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Let son find way to relate to dad

*BY DR. WANDA BETHEA
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QUESTION: I have a 24-year-old son, currently living with his father and his father's third wife in Georgia. His father and I have been divorced for more than 15 years, and he wasn't in his life as much as we both wanted. My son's father invited our son to come and live with him, but their current situation is tearing my son up inside. His father is treating him like a stranger and nitpicking about little things.

Recently, my son made plans to pick up his son (my grandson) in Florida but car problems happened before he left Georgia. My son asked his dad, who was traveling to Miami, if he could ride along since his dad was coming to Florida to pick up his other son.

Our son is "financially challenged," and when his dad asked how much money he had to help out on gas, apparently the response didn't go over very well because his father left for Miami without informing our son. That hurt my son and me. I had to comfort our son all weekend on the phone. His father missed out on a wonderful opportunity to bond with his two sons in harmony and a beautiful grandson.

Being his mother, I am hurting whenever he's hurt. I want to give him the best advice about how to handle this situation with his father, but I feel lost.

ANSWER: Your concern for your son's well-being is understandable. You want to assuage his disappointment with his father. You have heard only your son's side of the story. It seems his dad was compassionate enough to invite his son to live with him. What's changed, and why have things changed?

It can be difficult and equally challenging for you to stand by and let your son find the best way to have a relationship with his dad. Maybe the place for him to start is to recap with his dad what they initially had in mind when the living arrangement was proposed.

While his father appeared to be insensitive to his son's plight and request, there may be good reasons for deciding not to drive his two sons and grandson. Maybe there are things your son hasn't shared with you.

Father and son need more time to learn each other's habits and styles. Indeed, they need mutual willingness to give their newfound relationship a chance to grow. Even people who have been together a long time often need a refresher course on how to listen and respond appropriately to each other. For men, expressing and identifying certain feelings usually can be extremely challenging. Your son's financial challenges may signal he needs to pursue vocational or college training.

"The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge: 5 Principles to Transform Your Relationship with Money," by Ted Klontz, Rick Kahler and Brad Klontz, outline how a person's childhood messages about money (e.g. "money scripts") influence that individual's relationship with and behaviors concerning money in adulthood.

Such money scripts would include "People only want you for your money" and "Money is unimportant, only family is important." Those beliefs can be powerfully self-defeating, yet tend to be distorted or partial truths passed down in families.

Talk with your son about his "money scripts" and see how they might have contributed to his financial challenges and behaviors. He has a son of his own, and one day his son's money scripts will depend on your son's scripts or relationship with money.

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