

Dear Uncle Mike,

I think I've got a problem. My boyfriend's ex girlfriend is still part of his circle. This woman and I have never liked each other, wouldn't like each other whether we had a lover in common or not. There's nothing going on between them but they're obviously close and sometimes this makes me furious. I know it's stupid, I know it's jealousy over nothing. My boyfriend is getting fed up and I can see why.

I know what I have to do, change my attitude and behavior. I guess what I'm asking you is, know any quick and easy ways to do this?  
S.R., Reno

Dear S.R.,

Interesting words, quick and easy. Uncle Mike eagerly awaits any signs of quick and easy solutions to anything. There are quick and relatively easy actions which, if appropriate, lead to eventual solutions. Interesting word, solution. The first thing to do is separate your feelings from your behavior. There is no rule that says you must bond with this woman. There are rules that say you must, or at least should, be courteous and polite. You simply promise yourself you'll carry this off come hell or high water. Anything less than grace and charm is, or should be, beneath you. If, for no other reason, than that this woman is important to your partner.

Will this be easy? Probably not. It can, however, be fun. Or at least entertaining. There's nothing phony about charming the socks off unpleasant dinner companions. It comes under the heading, or used to, of social skills. Even cow persons in sawdust saloons think twice about calling someone a polecat. Make the first move. Take her hand, or hug her with an acceptable level of insincerity, say it's nice to see her, then move on. She'll be baffled and you must resist the urge to take advantage. Behave impeccably while maintaining reserve. You're not trying to make a friend, you're eliminating an enemy.

Changing your actions changes the system and her actions will change as a result. Next comes thought. Find something good about this woman (there must be something if your partner, a man of obvious good taste, was with her) and admit to yourself she's not the devil incarnate. When you think something negative about her, relentlessly balance it with something positive. It might help to say this aloud, in the bathroom, with your hand held over a candle flame.

Change in thought will result in change of feelings. Mental activity is electromagnetic, quick and active. Emotions are biochemical states, slow to be flushed away and replaced by something more appropriate. With the right attitude, you'll begin to feel differently about her. Unless, of course, she turns out to be the cheap hussy you thought she was and confuses your lack of hostility with weakness.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I feel silly calling you uncle since I'm probably older than you are. I've been married for twenty-seven years and still my husband amazes me. We went to my sister's for a family reunion. Just about everyone was there. After dinner (we ate at about three), my husband asked my brother in law if he could borrow an upstairs bedroom for a nap. I was mortified. Right in the middle of things, he slips off for half an hour. I didn't know what to say to the family. And he still doesn't think he did anything wrong. You'll probably agree with him but I thought I'd give it a try. Dear Abby gets so many letters, she'd probably not answer.

Laura D., Seattle

Dear Laura,

Surprise, Uncle Mike thinks you're right about two things. Dear Abby probably wouldn't have answered your letter. She's very busy trying to help people with real problems. Uncle Mike is busy too, but he's a much nicer person. You're also right about who Uncle Mike sides with on the question of naps. Naps are a big part of the pursuit of happiness which means countless of his countrymen and women have died to defend his right to curl up with a blanket whenever he wants.

Uncle Mike doesn't know your family. He can only hope for your husband's sake it's peopled with those who'd also agree you're full of beans. There's no item in the social code that says he can't slip off for a short snooze and Uncle Mike seriously doubts the festivities fondered as a result. If so, your family needs to be put to sleep. Feel free to try Abby for a second opinion.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My son is nine. He has a friend who's having a birthday party. The friend has a sister a year younger whose birthday is two days later. The party is for both of them and many of the children are planning to sleep over. I'm not sure about youngsters this age lolling around in their jammies watching videos together. I've met the parents only once. They seem nice, but who knows? Am I being old fashioned?

A Mom, Portland, Oregon

Dear Mom,

No dear, you're not being old fashioned. You're being ridiculous. You should be delighted your son and his friends even want to be in the same room with girl humans. Uncle Mike doubts seriously that the party will deteriorate into anything resembling the debauchery you imagine. If you want to play it especially safe, give your son a squirt gun and tell him to use it on anyone who suggests playing spin the bottle. Especially if they're in bunny pajamas.

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Miss Manners

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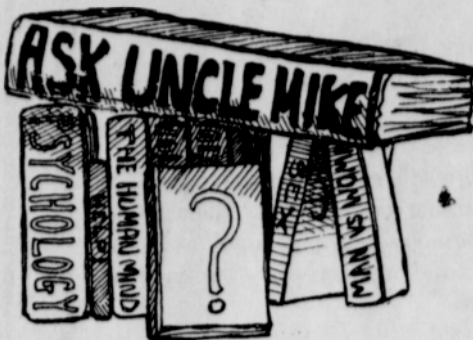
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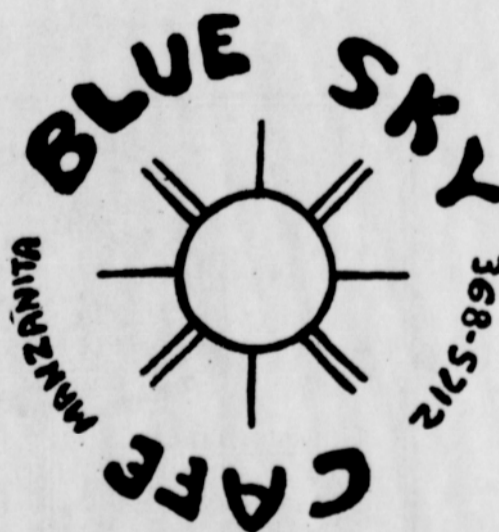
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