

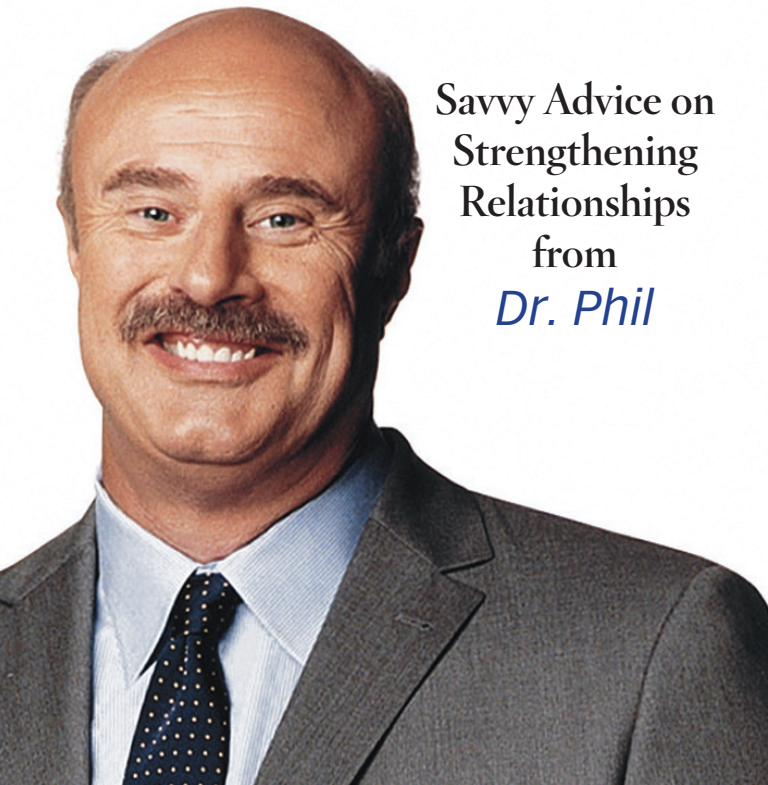
# O

THE OPRAH  
MAGAZINE

Presents...

## ***RELEASE & CONQUER!***

Savvy Advice on  
Strengthening  
Relationships  
from  
*Dr. Phil*



## Reclaim Your Life and Your Happiness

If you don't get the respect you deserve from your grown children, workmates or even your spouse — it's time to look in the mirror to find the real reason why.

In this straightforward Q&A format, you'll get Dr. Phil's no-nonsense advice as published in *O, The Oprah Magazine*. You'll also discover the most practical ways to:

- ❖ **Teach people to treat you better.**
- ❖ **Get (and keep!) your spouse's attention.**
- ❖ **Save a failing relationship.**
- ❖ **Rid yourself of toxic friendships.**
- ❖ *And much more!*

It's time to release and conquer the inner fear that's holding you back from genuine happiness. Read on to find out how!

## How to Teach People to Treat You Better

**Q:** Over the past few years, I've supported my brother and his two daughters financially because he's in the midst of a bitter separation. He seems to be in a stupor while his estranged wife cheats on him and neglects the children to the point that their care falls primarily to my 66-year-old mother. For their sakes, I've been purchasing groceries, gas, school supplies, and clothes to the tune of about \$15,000 (most of which hasn't been repaid). Now I'm receiving harassing phone calls from my sister-in-law. I want to be there for my nieces, but I can't put up with this anymore. Do I let my brother's life fall apart, or do I compel him to file for custody and keep helping them out in the meantime?

**Dr. Phil:** One of my life laws fully applies here — we teach people how to treat us. Your brother is letting you work harder than he is at managing his life because he sees that you'll be there to take over.

By cleaning up his messes, paying his bills, feeding his children, and fulfilling all his major responsibilities, you've taught him that it's okay to skip out on his duties.

But let me be clear — you are not your brother's keeper. You're falling victim to what I call emotional

extortion. Your brother knows you don't want the children to suffer; that's how he manipulates you into doing what he ought to be doing himself. Stop allowing that to happen and confront him.

Let him know that his wife's lousy conduct is no reason for him to slack off. In fact, her deficiencies make it all the more important that he do everything that's required of him, such as file for custody and buy food and clothing. If he's unwilling to do that, you need to alert Child Protective Services that these parents aren't meeting their obligations.

Your compassion is commendable. I appreciate that you want to be there for your nieces, and you can do that emotionally. But you can't act as a surrogate parent and let your brother exploit you. No father worth his salt would fail to step up and protect his children, and you can tell him I said so.

## **Do You Have What It Takes to Really Be Happy With Your Mate?**

**Q:** The biggest problem in my marriage is that my husband spends so much time on his hobbies, including watching football, playing video games, restoring a Jeep, playing softball, participating in Fantasy Football leagues, and traveling to sporting events (sometimes more than six hours away). I love him a lot, but

**I'm tired of competing for his attention. We have two children who, if asked, will say these pastimes are his main concern. I feel like such a low priority compared with these activities and am at the point where I'm thinking about leaving. Is it just me, or is his behavior extremely selfish?**

**Dr. Phil:** Every relationship is a negotiation, and what you've got here is a failure to negotiate. In this world, we often get what we ask for. If you're not being treated the way you'd like, that's partly your husband's responsibility — but you're also behaving in ways that permit what's going on.

Decide that you're going to step up and open the debate. Let him know that when he joins a softball game or spends hours working on his Jeep, you interpret it to mean that he'd rather do those things than spend time with you. Be very clear by saying you don't think you or the children should have to fight for his time.

Then be specific in asking for what you want, keeping in mind that there's a difference between telling him what you'd like him to do and telling him what *not* to do.

You can't simply say, "Don't play video games anymore." Instead, you might try, "I want a date night" or "I'd like to spend Saturdays with you and the kids."

If you need two weekends a month that aren't tied up with sports, say so. Sulking isn't going to yield different results. Just be careful not to create a backlash: Make sure he understands that you aren't requiring him to give up the hobbies he enjoys; you're looking only for balance.

Lastly, it's important to let him know that if he fails to make an attempt, you'll interpret his refusal as: "I know what you want and what you value, and I choose not to give it to you." If he persists, he's got more serious issues than priority management. I'd question his dedication to the marriage and visit a therapist together.

## How Invested Are You In Your Marriage?

**Q:** My father just left my mother after 34 years for a younger woman. This made me suspicious of my own husband, so I did something very wrong: I looked on his computer, where I found a saved conversation between him and his ex-girlfriend. My husband wrote that he remembered how happy he was with her and that he felt an urge to "misbehave." The only source of joy he mentions is our 2-year-old daughter. My heart is broken, and I don't know how to confront him. I'm furious enough to call his ex and tell her off, I'm disappointed enough to throw him out, and I'm mad enough to send a copy of the instant message to

**this woman's husband. She never agreed to anything, but her replies were very flirtatious. How am I supposed to handle this?**

**Dr. Phil:** There's no question that your husband is playing with fire, but you'll do yourself no good by lumping him together with your father. Focus on your own marriage, not your parents'. Your father and your husband aren't the same person, so make that distinction clear.

You're right, you shouldn't have snooped around. But you did, so you're going to have to address that. Be honest and tell him what you know, why you're upset, and why you're especially sensitive about it. Expect him to be angry that you violated his privacy.

You can forget about calling his old flame or her husband. Your marriage is under attack, your husband is behaving immaturely, and two wrongs do not make a right. Instead, confront him directly. Establish that even if he has a 12-page list of complaints about you, that's no excuse for finding solace with another woman. By the way, it's also entirely possible that his gripes are just a fantasy he cooked up to justify playing footsie with his ex. Regardless, you have zero responsibility for his inappropriate behavior.

Yelling, screaming, and gnashing your teeth ain't gonna help. You may feel the need to do that, but eventually you're going to have to calm down. I suggest you say something to your husband along the following lines:

### **Facing a Deceitful Spouse**

I want you to know that your conduct is completely unacceptable. You have turned outside our marriage to deal with a problem that's between you and me. Going behind my back is unquestionably an act of infidelity; it's insulting to me and to our family.

The fact that "all" you've been doing is talking to her online — if that's really all you've done — makes no difference. And if there's more to it, you need to tell me now, because we don't want to fix half a mistake. I expect you to get involved in hammering out our issues. If you think something's wrong between us, you owe it to me to look me in the eye and tell me. I deserve better than to have you sneaking around entertaining yourself with an ex, and I won't tolerate it.

You've damaged our family and our future; if you want my trust, you'll have to earn it back.

Let's talk about how far you've gone, and then let's make a list of what we have to contend with.

I don't think these circumstances are grounds for separation. If he's really only chatted online, you can probably recover—if he steps up. But if he's less than forthcoming, or their interactions have gone further than he initially admitted, you may have to think about kicking him to the curb. Cross that bridge once you know the facts.

## How to Rid Yourself of a Toxic Friendship

**Q:** How do you end a friendship that has lasted almost 20 years? My girlfriend and I have known each other since we were 10 years old. She introduced me to my husband, and we were maids of honor in each other's weddings. But over the past two years, I've realized I can't stand her. She and her husband are snobby and manipulative. They're constantly trying to get us to do what they want, from drinking wines they approve of to taking expensive trips we can't afford. I feel as though we're always in competition with each other. It's hard to completely cut her off because our husbands have become close. What can I do?

**Dr. Phil:** A friendship doesn't have to be a life sentence. People change over time, and we become

more or less compatible. A true friend is sensitive to you, has your welfare at heart, and makes you feel good just by being around her. It sounds like your old pal no longer meets those criteria.

I believe that honesty is the best policy. Without being cruel, let her know that the two of you aren't in tune anymore. If she wants examples, give them to her. Point out how she and her husband always pick the movies and the wines and take trips that aren't in the cards for you. Let her know that you don't enjoy the competitiveness.

If your husbands want to continue socializing, they can, but right now the best idea is to give yourself some room to breathe. You may decide to continue the relationship on a limited basis; if so, you're going to have to clarify the new boundaries.

Having said all this, I suggest you also ask yourself why you're letting yourself be dominated by this person. If you know who you are and what you stand for, then what somebody else wants you to do should be of little importance.

Give that some thought before you talk to your friend. She may be enlightened by your input and offer a compromise by dialing down her assertiveness. You'll have to decide how to proceed after you see her reaction.

## Going Forward

You've just seen how these folks can release inner fear and conquer internal demons that rob them of the life they deserve. Now it's time to put this advice to use in your own life.

- ❖ If you're sick and tired of being taken advantage of – *teach people to treat you better*. Prevent “emotional extortion” by refusing to allow yourself to be manipulated by others.
- ❖ If you're trying to get (and keep!) your spouse's attention – by all means, *negotiate!* In this world, we often get what we ask for. Be specific in asking for what you want. For example, make sure your husband understands that you're not requiring him to give up the hobbies he enjoys; you're looking only for balance.
- ❖ If you're dealing with a less than truthful spouse – take the first step to *open the lines of communication*. Listen carefully and try to stay calm. Remember, your number one goal is to resolve the issue.
- ❖ And, if you're plagued by an unhealthy friendship – remember, *a friendship doesn't have to be a life sentence*. People change over time, and we

become more or less compatible. If you're old pal no longer meets the criteria of a good friend, sit her down and explain why you feel the two of you aren't in tune anymore. Decide how to proceed after determining her reaction.

You have the power to restore balance and harmony in your life. And, there's no time like the present – why not start now?