

April 21, 2011

“Spiritually Speaking”, Crescenta Valley Weekly, Posted by Robin Goldsworthy
<http://www.crescentavalleyweekly.com/religion/04/21/2011/spiritually-speaking/>

QUESTION:

Our 19-year-old daughter told us that she'll be moving out of state for the summer and would return in August. She is only 12 credits from her first degree. She told us that she's been dating a man since January who is 14 years older than she is. Although they've been dating for three months, we were just told about it; however she has met his parents. I guess we are lucky she didn't just send us a postcard from another state.

He's in construction and recently took a large job in the state where she will be for the summer and has offered her a laborer's job on the construction crew. We are stunned, and out of breath. Her father and I listened to her for over an hour, very quietly. We did have a nice lengthy discussion, we told her that we want what she wants, but that she had to fully examine this 14 year gap between her and her boyfriend. What is our responsibility in this situation?

- Concerned parents in Glendale

ANSWER:

Dear Concerned Parents,

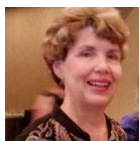
As the parent of four grown children and a pastoral counselor, I have the greatest empathy for you and the concerns you have about your daughter's choices for the summer and her serious relationship with a man who is 14 years older than she is. We all want the best for children, and that includes the decisions they make about romantic connections. We certainly don't want them to be hurt even when they are adults.

Let me say that I commend you for taking over an hour to talk with your daughter and listen to her. I am just sorry she did not let you in on her plans and her relationship with this young man sooner. I encourage you to continue discussion with her and to support her ongoing discernment in the matter. And please do not take a stance of stern opposition to this relationship, something that is likely to bring about a reinforcement of your daughter's position in her boyfriend's favor.

You say that she has met the young man's parents. This would certainly be a good time to ask her to invite him to meet you. You may find that he is someone you can truly appreciate. If not, you have at least shown your openness to a potential connection. Such a meeting could also provide your daughter with the opportunity to see how he fits in with the people who have raised her and supported her in getting a further education.

In addition, you could suggest that she talk with some other adult about her plans. Perhaps there is family friend, a teacher, or counselor whom she admires. You could even ask if she would be willing to see a psychologist to help her with clarity. Or, if you are connected to a faith community, she could speak with the pastor of that congregation. However because she may not believe she has a problem that needs to be solved, these suggestions would need to be broached sensitively.

My hope for you is that you and your daughter will find a way to navigate this situation that will strengthen your relationship with her and give her the tools she needs to grow into a clear-thinking adult. I will be keeping you in my thoughts and prayers, and I encourage you to tap into your own spiritual resources for your continued journey as parents – a journey that lasts a lifetime.



Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford
Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Verdugo Hills, La Crescenta