

Father Not Invited To Daughter's 18th Birthday Party

Q.

Dear Dr. Warshak: My new husband's daughter is turning 18 next week. My husband went through an extremely bitter divorce and his ex is still extremely bitter.

Our problem is, the 18 year old is having a party for her birthday and my husband's entire family is invited, but my husband has been told that he is not welcomed. His family consists of three brothers (plus one brother's spouse and two nieces). We asked that we have a separate party for the girls for my husband's family which would include my husband to show the girls that his family supported him. However they all went.

Maybe we are wrong in thinking that his family should not go. But we need help. We tried to communicate this to his family but the brother's spouse interfered and demanded that they all go. I believe this helps that ex-spouse in her alienation tactics. But I do not know how to help my husband. He spends as much time as he can get with his girls. The ex says the girls would be embarrassed to have him at the parties. How do we react? What do we discuss with his family? Or do we just leave it alone?

A.

Without knowing more of the facts about relationships in this family, it is difficult for me to recommend one course over the other. The key is to always consider how the child feels under given circumstances.

I think, in this case, it can help to know what is meant by the term embarrassed. Since the daughter in question does spend some time with her dad, I will assume that she is not completely rejecting him. Perhaps what she labels embarrassment is really tension at having both parents in the same room or awkwardness at having her mother and stepmother in the same room.

Knowing the roots of the embarrassment could lead to a productive conversation and perhaps another way to handle the situation without rejecting her dad. Most importantly, it's important to figure out if this is the child talking of her embarrassment, or the mother camouflaging an excuse to not invite the father.

The question about whether or not the dad's relatives should boycott the party is difficult to answer without knowing the reasons why Dad is unwelcome. If this girl is alienated from her dad for no good reason, the relatives will have reasons both to attend the party and not to attend. If the family came to Dad's defense by avoiding the party, this would most likely result in the rupture of the girls' relationship with the extended family.

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Instead, attending the party would allow them to maintain a connection with their niece and increase the chances that this connection will serve in the future as a bridge to the father. In such a case, the relatives should let the girl know that they think she is making a big mistake by rejecting the only father she has. They should tell her that she does not have to demonstrate her loyalty to her mom by giving up her dad. And, when they host family functions in their home, they should certainly not appease any demand that the father be excluded.

When in doubt, I would err in the direction of attending the party with the hope that the relatives can exercise some influence to help their niece treat her dad with more love and respect. If the girl is willing to have a second birthday celebration with her father and his family, the father should arrange this and his family should support him.

If this father is being excluded from the party for no good reason, his family should recognize the cruelty in this and help their brother celebrate the birth of his child.

Finally, if the girl is trying to meet her mother's emotional needs at the expense of her relationship with her dad, a nice set of gifts for her and her mom might be my book, *Divorce Poison*, and Jann and Sharyl's book, [Ex-Etiquette for Parents: Good Behavior After a Divorce or Separation](#).