

your letters

AMI MAGAZINE

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Empower Your Clients

But don't cut off their blessings

In reference to Letters, Issue 472

Dear Editor:

I am writing in response to the letter written by Mr. Moshe Norman, LCSW. He felt that social workers were getting a bad rap since it appeared that they were alienating clients from their parents. He explained that clients often suffered from anxiety as children or inadequate boundaries from parents, prompting them seek counseling in the first place.

This all makes a lot of sense. Adult children who want to become emotionally healthier should get the right help and support. They should set boundaries if that will alleviate the problem, and they should gain more self-confidence once their anxiety is resolved. And yes, it can be quite a surprise to a parent to suddenly find a normally reserved child very confidently setting boundaries against them. As a parent, one might even become quite hurt at a certain point.

But there is one thing that is totally unacceptable, and that is when a child stops speaking to his parents and prevents his children from having anything to do with them. This is all done in the name of the therapist.

As a professional therapist, you surely realize how much clout your words carry. Surely you understand that if you tell your client to do something, you must make it explicitly clear that everything has to be done with a balance.

Extremes are never a good thing. As a therapist, it is imperative that while you are empowering your clients, you also help them balance their thoughts with an appreciation of their parents. Explain to them that even if their parents made mistakes, they really did try to do the best they could under the circumstances.

As children, we expect our parents to be perfect, and we are deeply frustrated when we discover that they aren't. But every child needs his or her parents, regardless of their age and situation in life.

As a person who is in a powerful position, use your influence to help your clients become their best selves, but don't discourage the blessings in their lives—like their parents.

A Parent Who Has Been There

A Response from Moshe Norman, LCSW, and Nechama Dina Reinitz, LMSW

We are sorry that you have gone through the difficult ordeal of alienation. It is clear that you have been deeply hurt. Unfortunately, we are both familiar with the extreme pain and despair that parents face when they have devoted themselves

to raising children, only to have the children turn on them. The objective of the original letter was to clarify the role of psychotherapists to the public in a general sense. The field of psychotherapy is complex, and each situation is unique.

When a client is challenged by unhealthy relationships, a therapist will educate the client about healthy and unhealthy patterns in relationships. When appropriate, the therapist may try to help the client consider the perspectives of others in those relationships. However, the client may not be ready or willing to do that. There may be a number of reasons this occurs.

Often, the pain and shame that arise in the initial stages of therapy prevent the client from facing the parent. Hopefully, during the healing process, the client will in time become willing to mend the relationship, but unfortunately that may not always happen. Pushing a client who is not ready or willing to reconnect would cause harm. Whatever the reason for the alienation, the parents' suffering cannot be diminished.

In family therapy the focus is on the relationship itself. With several members present, it is possible to have all the members give input and to help the family learn how to consider each other's perspective and improve the family dynamic. This is only possible when those involved agree to come together.

As far as the "clout" or "power" that you

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say therapists have with their clients, a licensed, competent therapist must exercise restraint in giving advice, because doing so creates a number of problems. First, it creates a power dynamic that is unethical. It places the therapist's need to "fix" the situation, which is another way of saying "control," above the needs of the client. Even when the advice is offered with the best of intentions, it is problematic. This is where supervision for a therapist is important, because it is easy for anyone to fall into this trap. Professional ethics guide therapists to prevent abuse of power.

Second, advice-giving is counterproductive to the therapy process. The role of a therapist is to help a client come to understand his or her difficulties, learn how to navigate challenges in a healthier way, and facilitate the client's ability to heal and grow.

Rejection is always painful. When that pain is used as a catalyst for growth, the healing can be powerful.

Moshe Norman, LCSW

Moshe is a family therapist in private practice in Lakewood, NJ, and the clinical supervisor at Quality Families, LLC.

Nechama Dina Reinitz, LMSW

Nechama Dina is a therapist in Brooklyn, NY, who is experienced with families impacted by mental illness and substance use.

Response to Events

How Jews deal with adversity

In reference to "The Rebbetzin Speaks," Issue 472

Dear Editor:

Rebbetzin Twerski, *shetichyeh*, I read your article in *AmiLiving* last Shabbos and it really warmed my heart, reminding me of two experiences in particular.

I remember calling you a while back after reading an article you had written about your father, the Faltichaner Rav, *zt"l*. I had the great honor to meet him when he stayed in my parents' home in Miami Beach for a short while one winter. At the time, my parents were living in Israel for a few months a year, and they were happy for the Faltichaner Rav to stay in their home while they were away.

As my parents were not at home, my husband and I were able to do the mitzvah of *bachnasas orchim* since we lived a few blocks away. My parents gave me very strict instructions for how to care for the Rav. Miami Beach did not yet have many of the services and amenities needed by a *chareidi*, and certainly a *gadol*.

My father, Yehudah Aryeh Hakohen Rapaport, *zt"l*, told us that if the Rav could not find a particular *sefer* in the library, my husband was to find it, and we were to be available around the clock to attend to his needs. I was also to go to the house each day to take care of any shopping requests. My father said, "The Rav is a true *gadol* and deserves the utmost *kavod*. He came for a rest and should not have to be disturbed by *shtuyos*."

I would often have my son, Avi, accompany me so that he could perhaps be of help as well. I also wanted him to see that his grandparents' home was always available for *gedolei hador* (and anyone else who needed a place to stay in Miami Beach).

I was very fortunate to live in Miami Beach at the time because we were able to

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