

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Monday, 07 March 2016 14:44



Crippling Attitudes

Dear Aunt Bossy,

I have a friend who has a child who was born with a severe physical disability. I can't imagine anything more painful because we want the best for our children. However, this friend has made her child's handicap her claim to fame. It is all she talks about, and she has devoted much of her life to making sure her son is included in every activity, even if it means radically adjusting the activities of the other kids involved.

She uses his condition to aggrandize herself on every occasion. As much as my heart goes out to her and her son, there is something disgusting about this.

What do you think?

Repulsed.

Dear Repulsed,

Firstly, this is not your business. However, here are my thoughts on the subject at hand.

There is truly no greater love than a mother for her child and we all want our children to have every advantage. When a mother has a child who is challenged in any area, it is only natural to do whatever is humanly possible to make that child feel loved and included.

The fine line comes in supporting the child's identity. If the mother sentimentalizes the challenge, whether it is physical or mental, and treats the child as "special" because of his or her human limitation, the message can get skewed in the child's mind, and the child could feel defined by his or her limitations.

A child with an obvious limitation may feel that very limitation is something to be valued and treasured and may depend on that to get attention and favor. Even worse, the child may feel that anyone who doesn't go to great lengths to accommodate him is an uncaring and bad person.

We are all multi-leveled creatures and should develop ourselves as a whole. If a child is celebrated because of a limitation, he or she will put attention and energy into that, and feel that that is his or her major attribute.

It is akin to constantly praising a very handsome or beautiful child of limited intelligence for their beauty. They will focus on that and fail to put effort into becoming smarter in whatever way they're capable. The same applies to focusing on a child's intelligence, to the detriment of the emotional and social component. We see this arrogant, overbearing intelligence far too often, especially in the academic and political world.

Humans need balance. If your child has an imbalance in ability, it is your job to help him or her find areas to add balance, not to turn that imbalance into an attention-getting trick, which will eventually lead the kid to wise up and become angry.

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My heart goes out to this mother, who, from what you say, was so devastated by the birth of a less than perfect child that she overcompensates to make herself and her child feel valuable. But for the grace of God, all mothers could walk in those shoes.

If you are a true friend, you will reach out to include her child in activities where he is accepted, even though he may not be able to participate to the same extent that other kids can. The message is that he might not be able to fit in in this area but IT DOESN'T MATTER. He should learn to feel valuable even when he is not being accommodated. We are all handicapped in some sense and shouldn't avoid interaction with those who are more naturally gifted or talented than we are. Learning to be comfortable where we don't "fit in," is invaluable.

None of us should be defined by what is wrong with us.

Be nice.

Best,

Aunt Bossy