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Ask Amy: A man’s choice to use a slur riles the family



By **AMY DICKINSON** | askamy@amydickinson.com | Chicago Tribune  
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**Dear Amy:** At the end of an extremely long road trip, my fiancée, her 16-year-old son and I stopped at a noisy sports bar at 9:30 p.m. — famished.

As we waited for our food, I saw an article regarding a woman who was recently fired for using a slang variant of “the N-word.”

I turned to my fiancée to recount the story, but instead of using the variant of the word I saw in the article, I leaned in and in a very low voice said the actual (offensive) word to her, never intending for her son to hear it.

When we got into the car, her son vehemently questioned why I had used the word. I was stunned. His tone and aggression were totally disproportionate to my action. I got angry because of his tone and told them.

My fiancée sided with her son.

She said his tone was justified by my saying the word in his presence (we are all Northern European, by the way).

I am a politically progressive American who has supported many Black candidates, worked for voting rights, and have many Black friends.

My fiancée has asked that I move back to my own house for an uncertain duration.

I have apologized for getting angry, but my fiancée says that the problem was that I didn’t respect her son for standing up for his beliefs. She believes that I should have just apologized and ignored his tone.

Your thoughts?

— *Stunned Man*

**Dear Stunned:** To be clear, it is possible to tell a story about a slur without choosing to use the slur.

I believe your choice to invoke this offensive slur (rather than refer to it in another way), was deliberate and terrible. And you knew that this would likely offend others, which is why you decided to whisper it to your fiancée.

The teen waited until dinner was over and then confronted you.

When communicating with teenagers, it’s wisest to avoid being triggered by their tone by addressing their core issue first, and returning to the topic of tone later.

So yes, I agree with your fiancée regarding responding to his teenage anger with your own anger.

Furthermore, I give him props for confronting you about it — he has a voice and the right to use it.

I also note that you say you have apologized for getting angry, but not for using the slur.

If you are going to be in a family together, the adults need to be wise and brave enough to tackle huge challenges together, as a unit. The adults also need to model good behavior by apologizing when they’ve made a mistake.

Also — because you’ve chosen to assert your allyship, I note that you don’t seem to have asked your Black friends for their unfiltered view of your choice, presumably because you don’t want to risk offending them.

**Dear Amy:** My wife and I were together for seven years and married for 16 months before I realized that she had been having an affair with a mentee that became a friend for several months.

She went from wanting to work on our marriage to wanting space to decide what she wants.

I moved out and she kept seeing the other girl.

She recently said that things feel different between us. She wants to be OK and not be responsible for hurting people, so she thinks that the book is closing on the marriage.

I have not spoken to her since, but she recently texted, saying, “I’m thinking of you, but I’m not sure if you want me to text. Should I text you?”

How should I even respond? The last few months have been nothing but talk, and I’m sick of it.

— *Self Respect*

**Dear Self Respect:** I have great news for you. YOU are now in charge of this relationship — or what’s left of it.

In my opinion, your response to your wife’s query should be — no response at all. Let her continue to “find herself” while listening to ... crickets.

It’s time to focus on your own health and healing. See a lawyer and a counselor.

**Dear Amy:** “Wanting Some Friends” was a young mom who wanted to make friends for herself and her kids. She should visit churches, synagogues, or mosques in her area to make friends.

— *Church Family Donna*

**Dear Donna:** In my (extensive) experience, it can take a very long time to make friends through houses of worship, while meeting families at a playground or library promotes almost instant bonding.

*(You can email Amy Dickinson at [askamy@amydickinson.com](mailto:askamy@amydickinson.com) or send a letter to Ask Amy, P.O. Box 194, Freeville, NY 13068. You can also follow her on Twitter [@askingamy](https://twitter.com/askingamy) or Facebook.)*

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Dear Stunned, a 16 year old, as you must realize since you were 16 at some point, has many emotions and hasn’t learned appropriate ways of expressing them. Grown men should have learned long ago about how to respond to justifiable criticism. I applaud the 16 year old for waiting until you left the bar to question you because the word you used is hateful and of a different era. That’s why you were whispering it. And that you even decided the article to tell your fiancée about a story that someone was fired for using the word begs the question, why? Were you incredulous that someone would be fired for using a hate word? You should have apologized because you were in the wrong and let it go. As you said it was a late night and I imagine all nerves were frayed. It seems a slight overreaction by your fiancée to banish you so I wonder if there have been other small incidents that have caused her to question whether you are the right man for her.

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