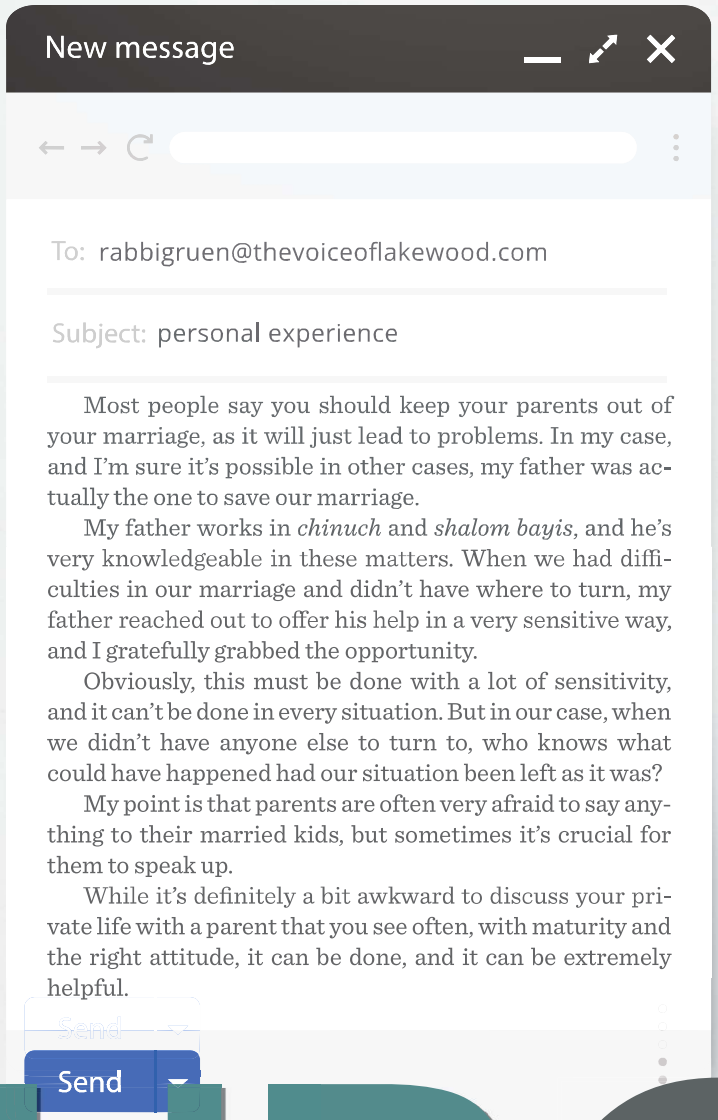
OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP



RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

HANDLE WITH CARE

I agree that there's a time and place for everything. With the right amount of intelligence and sensitivity, there have been parents who've successfully been helpful in improving their children's marriage.

It isn't often, though, that parents can be actively involved and still keep their eyes solely on the end goal while simultaneously making sure to do and say only what's good for the child and the marriage. Naturally, parents are subjective and unintentionally tend to give comments and advice that are more about them or their child's well-being, overlooking the benefit of the relationship. This could be due to their personal agendas or even just the intense emotions they feel for their struggling child.

If one can truly leave their ego and subjectivity out of the picture, which is a tall order, then yes, I agree that there's a time and place for parental involvement in maintaining a child's marriage. For this to work, both sides must be sensitive and mature—the child, who will need to figure out how to accept and implement the advice correctly,



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

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and the parent, who needs to know how to offer clear and gentle input properly.

I can't agree more with you that this won't work in every situation. I wish it were simpler to be able to assess when it can or can't work instead of learning the hard way.

Disagree

CASE BY CASE

While I can't disagree with much once we already established that this isn't for everyone, I'd like to add a caveat to the above.

When assessing a situation, it needs to be done on a case-by-case basis depending on all the relevant dynamics.

It's well-known that telling a story about the Ba'al Shem Tov on Motza'ei Shabbos is a *segulah* for *parnassah*. One of the tzaddikim commented that while that's a true statement, it includes three inaccuracies. It doesn't have to be a story specifically about the Baal Shem Tov, and not only on Motza'ei Shabbos, and it's a *segulah* for many things, not only for *parnassah*. Telling a story of a tzaddik, whoever and whenever, brings about great *hashpa'os*.

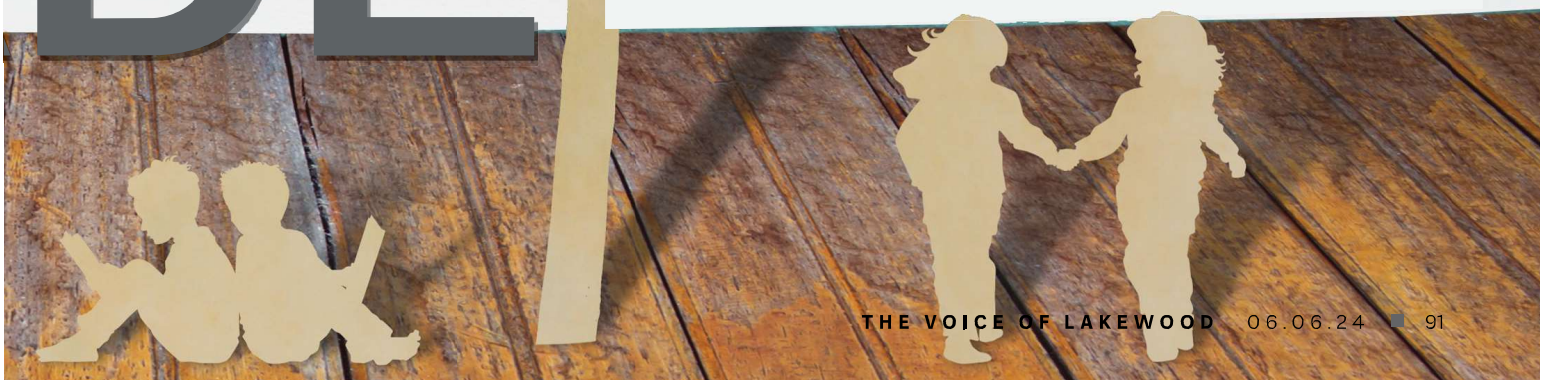
By the same token, I'd like to clarify that it isn't only a father who works in *chinuch* and *shalom bayis* who can help a child, nor is everyone who does fall into that category necessarily right for the job. In most cases, having parents involved in their children's marriage is not the typical path to success. Even the most skilled parents (and sometimes specifically those) are usually not the ones who can or should help their children's marriages. This is not due to their lack of understanding in the area, but due to the parent-child dynamic, which can get in the way of this sensitive topic.

In the situations where it can be done properly, it's not limited only to people in exactly your situation. Sometimes, a well-meaning parent can be the best one to help even when other, more competent options are available. Each situation must be judged on a case-by-case basis to ensure that with the right amount of caution and *siyata d'Shmaya*, the couple gets the right help. Often, you'll need a wise person to help you figure out if this can be a viable option for you before starting on this path or even when you're knee-deep in such a situation already.

I would add...

THE DETAILS

I hope I'm not getting too nitty-gritty, but I will add that when it comes to helping a child in their marriage, one must know where to draw the line. Aside from not every parent being the right one for the job, and neither parent nor child should be offended if and when the other feels



they aren't the right one to step in and help, it's important for both parent and child to be aware that there are many situations where a parent could help a child on a certain level, and there are times they need to step back.

For instance, sometimes parents can be instrumental in supporting a child when their marriage is in crisis mode. But there comes a point where they're not the right people for the job anymore and it's time to hand over the reins.

Other times, a parent could help a child as long as they're *not* in crisis mode. But once something goes beyond their pay grade, they (both) need to know that it's time for them to step down. Even if something looks like it was or wasn't a fit at a certain stage, it's important to realize when that changes.

It's also crucial to mention that while a parent is helping a child, they must make sure the help is healthy and focused. It can often look innocent and supportive, but when over time they become the go-to person for their child to lean on, they become like a second spouse. While it may have originally helped the marriage to some extent, it slowly develops into an unhealthy dependency where, for example, the woman gets from her father what she should have been getting from her husband.

While it may have originally helped the marriage to some extent, it slowly develops into an unhealthy dependency

Whether you turn to your parents or to anyone else for help with your marriage, remember to stay focused on the goal, which is to build the marriage. The fact that there's less stress in the marriage and that you're less angry at your spouse isn't enough of an indicator that your parents, or anyone else who is helping you, is the right match or helping your marriage. Always remember to rethink: "Is this making my marriage healthier? Is the connection with my spouse getting better and stronger?" Check in often to make sure you're working toward the goal.

This reminds me of...

TRUE STORY

I remember when a man came to me, perplexed. This was someone to whom many people turned for advice, and many felt that his words were on target. At some point, one of his sons-in-law reached out to him, and he was supportive and helpful and able to help his daughter's marriage without her even knowing of his involvement. He did it very carefully and very responsibly, I must say.

Then, another child of his was struggling with something personal, and he wasn't able to help that child. He was bothered by this and wondered why he was able to help his son-in-law with a marriage issue, which is even more sensitive, while his child wouldn't let him offer his help.

We discussed how the match, the connection, between a parent and child or anyone else, even a therapist, has to work. The dynamics in each relationship are so different that it's important to be okay with the fact that what works for one may not work for another. This isn't only about something as sensitive as *shalom bayis*, involving another spouse and delicate topics, it's regarding everything else too, almost down to helping to build a *sukkah*!

To the child who's thinking, *If only my father or my mother was able to help me. How come other peoples' parents could?* or a parent who's wondering, *Why can't I help my child? If only they would let me!* remember: the relationship between the helper and the recipient has to click. It often has to do with the personalities of the people involved and some other factors as well, and what works for one doesn't always work for the other.

The bottom line is that one must always evaluate whether the help is actually helping. Does it just feel good, or does it bring the desired success? Does it make you look good, or does it promote true happiness? Does it help only you or all those involved?

Both child and parent need to remember how limited they might be regarding taking or giving help and be responsible and mature about pushing the limits and boundaries or allowing them to be pushed.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen, author of the bestselling book *Get along with Everyone*, consults and guides individuals in the areas of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch* through classes, workshops, teleconferences, and one-on-one counseling. He specializes in guiding and counseling based on a very deep understanding of personality assessment. Many of his classes can be found on TorahAnytime.com.

Are you on either side of the adult child-parent/in-law relationship? Feel free to share your thoughts by contacting Rabbi Gruen at rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com.
Your correspondence will be kept anonymous and identifying details will be changed to protect your privacy.

