

Family Life... The spiked cherries

Situation:

When I was talking to my sister on the phone last Sunday afternoon she mentioned that she made some more Vodka spiked cherries and took them to a party and everyone just loved them. This is the third or fourth conversation in a row where Vicky has told me about something to do with alcohol. To me, it's an indication that she's drinking more than usual.

Symptoms:

When I got off the phone it seemed like all I could do was think about Vicky and her drinking. I was trying to rationalize her situation. She was going through a rough time for a while with noisy neighbors, but that's been resolved. I thought maybe she was drinking to help her get some sleep. So maybe she got back into the habit of drinking and she's stayed with it. I hope not. Years ago Vicky was into recreational drugs, from what I could gather, back then she did it pretty often. The recent past three or four years have been different. Even when we'd spent a week together she never smoked any marijuana. I thought she had left all that behind her.

I was so worried it was as if my thoughts were stuck in replay. "What if she has a car accident? What if she loses her job? What if her drinking gets to be a real problem? Will she know enough to go for help?"

Solution:

It didn't take too long for me to figure out that I was playing therapist – for her, when in fact I needed to be working on me!

There is a definite difference between concern and worry. I know that. I can be lovingly concerned about my sister. I can't afford to worry about her. She's 45 years old. She's done OK in the past, and she will most probably do OK in the future. She's not wrong, she is average for drinking and making spiked maraschino cherries. She's not right, she's not wrong. She's average.

I'm not right because I don't care to drink. And she's not wrong for liking to drink. I'm not better because I don't care to drink, she's not worse because she likes to drink. Period.

I was blowing things way out of proportion. When Vicky was into drugs before, she was romantically involved with a bum. He's been out of the picture for more than eight years. The secure thought is that she's left drinking alone in the past for long stretches of time, and if she chooses to I'm sure she can do it again.



The fact is, I don't really know how much she's drinking now. She lives 2000 miles away from me. It could very well be that the times she mentioned alcohol to me in the last two months were the only time she had any.

Vicky is my outer environment. I can't control what she does. I can't control what she doesn't do. All I can control is my thoughts and my behavior.

In the past:

If I got worried in the past, I'd call our other sister Beth and talk to her. First I'd hint around that Vicky might have a problem, then I'd probe: "How many times have you talked to Vicky? How many times did she mention booze?" On and on I'd go. If Beth didn't think Vicky had a problem, in other words if she didn't agree with me, I'd talk to a friend about the situation. I'd keep talking to people until I found one or two who would agree with me. I had to prove I was "right."

I would always make a big deal out of everything. Then I'd wonder why I was so tense. I'd make up problems where there were none.

