

# Carolyn Hax: Inked gay daughter feels stifled at parents' conservative community

Letter writer shamed by parents' enthusiasm for their condo community's strict rules on clothing, tattoos and piercings.

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**Dear Carolyn:** My parents, who are in their 60s, are starting to spend more and more time in the Floridian country club community where they recently purchased a condo. The expectation around the holidays is that we will come and visit them and stay for a while. My younger brother brings his wife and small children, who absolutely love it there.

I feel betrayed and stifled. There are **strict rules around the condo complex**, at the club itself and on the beach — **no tattoos, specific attire, no body piercings. I am a heavily tattooed, body-hair-covered lesbian** whose general existence is policed in this place. At first, it was fine, but it became clear quickly that my mother loves to have a reason to tell me to cover up while being able to hide behind the fact that it's "just the rules." The final straw for me was when I offered to take my niece outside, but my mother informed me that some of the neighbors were outside who had more conservative views and might not approve of my appearance.

To her, she was just suggesting I would be more comfortable avoiding an unpleasant reaction. To me, she was saying that she would absolutely not consider standing up for me and that a smooth relationship with her new neighbors was more important than her own daughter.

I am at a loss. I want to see my family, particularly the children, and enjoy the holidays somewhere warm and beautiful. I cannot stand to basically keep myself inside or fully covered at all hours just to avoid the slightest bit of unpleasantness for my parents.

Is there a way to talk to them about this that won't escalate to a larger fight about whether they should be expected to sell their condo and move to accommodate me? Am I forced to choose between my comfort and ever spending the holidays with my family?

They are always so generous with their time, money and space, and they themselves have always been liberal and somewhat accepting — but I have spent so much of my life trying to fit into the country club box, and I just don't know if I can do it much longer.

**In Distress**

**Answer, see page 2**

**In Distress:** I am sorry your generous and accepting-ish parents chose such an ungenerous place to settle in for their grandparent years.

I am also sorry for the message. I don't think you got the wrong one from your mother — that in a complicated world, she likes the simplicity of letting “the rules” make your differences in personal expression go away.

I realize that's a lot of conclusion to draw just from your brief account. But of all the condo complexes in all of Florida, they bought into this one? Huh.

As sympathetic as I am, though, the idea that a conversation would ever veer into a brawl over their accommodating you by selling the condo they just bought seems bonkers to me.

Not that you don't 100 percent deserve a place where you feel comfortable. You absolutely do. But the time for your parents to shop for that right thing just happened, and they zeroed in on Rearstick Estates. So I guess I just don't see anything for you to gain by trying to relitigate their decision now.

Do tell them you're hurt. That's fair. Admit you feel rejected and forced to choose between your comfort and ever spending the holidays with your family.

But don't ask them for anything beyond awareness of how you feel. No escalating, certainly.

Instead, I suggest *de*-escalating. Decide on a general approach to these visits you can live with, then ask your parents to accept it on principle. Then don't refight the battles again.

The most obvious approach is not to go. Plan to see your parents and your brother and his family at other places and times.

Another approach is to reach an agreement with your mother beforehand. Something like: “Send me the bylaws, I'll pack and even shop accordingly” (time with the kids time with the kids time with the kids, that's your mantra here), “but no correcting me during the visit. It's insulting. Deal?”

Another approach is just to do you, in all your glory. “Love you guys. But I'm coming dressed as me. I'll handle the side-eye from neighbors.”

Or maybe a fourth or fifth approach suits you better. What matters is *your* peace with it. Not mine or theirs or the neighbors'.

Here's a travel-size version: You can't change their hurtful decision; you can only minimize its effects on you; all those little do-I-or-don't-I questions force you to relive (i.e., maximize) the effects; so decide your approach to visits up front, wholesale; tell your parents you're hurt and this is your answer; either secure their support or declare it's not up for debate.

Whew. Again, I'm sorry — it's a reflection on them, not you.

Carolyn Hax