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love

he loves a crowd

had to say

Carolyn Bushong

that he was in turmoil over balancing his two families. She came to realize that his behavior, though frustrating, was rooted in love.

"After the couple had reached an understanding, the next step was to establish boundaries with Rob's family. To prepare, I had him practice saying things like, 'Of course I love you, Mom. But this is something I need to do for my marriage so Yvonne and I can become as strong as you and Dad are.'"

"I also taught Yvonne and Rob four prompts for healthy conflict resolution. The idea is that you can fill in the blanks for any situation. For instance, Rob could tell his mother, 'I feel upset when you pressure us to visit during the week. I want you to know that we love seeing you on Sundays. Will you give us the space that we need? If not, my happiness could really suffer.'"

"In the end, Rob's family was understanding and agreed to respect the couple's space. And once Yvonne was assured that Rob was on her side, she no longer felt threatened if her husband decided to attend an impromptu family gathering with or without her."

doing now

Rob Gagliasso, 43

"She wants to turn me against my family!"

"My wife doesn't understand the Italian way," explains Rob, shaking his head. "We're spontaneous. Everybody has a key to everybody's house. We show up and walk through the door...it's a free-for-all. In fact, my kid brother and I call ourselves *mommoni*—that's Italian for 'mama's boys.' I feel incredibly fortunate to have such a close-knit family."

"I know my marriage comes first, but I don't see why it has to drive a wedge between my parents and me. They've been my support system for my entire life, and now Yvonne wants me to cut them off. Why do I have to choose between the people I love? Sometimes I worry that deep down, Yvonne doesn't like my family. And I'm scared that the friction is going to get so bad, my mother and father will stop talking to me. It creates a dark cloud over everything. Like on date night with Yvonne last week: How am I supposed to respond when my mother says, 'What, you're too good for my cooking now?' It creates stress for me."

"If it were up to me, I'd have a huge family dinner every night. That's the whole point of life: to enjoy it with the people you love. The more, the merrier! But Yvonne seems to view this as a sign of immaturity."

"She should have known what she was getting into—our very first night together was a double date with my brother. And I've been a good son all my life. That's the person Yvonne fell in love with. From day one I thought her low-key nature was a great complement to my personality. But now I'm not so sure. Are we *too* different to get past this?"

marriage SOS

She wants couple time,

What the counselor

Yvonne Gagliasso, 43, Saratoga, CA

"I'm married to him and his mother!"

"I love my in-laws to death, but if it were up to my husband, he'd spend every waking minute with them," says Yvonne Gagliasso, who has been married to Rob for one year. "We're surrounded: Rob's younger brother lives right next door, and his mother and father are five minutes away. He and I are never alone, and I'm constantly fighting for time with him."

"For instance, last Wednesday I got him to agree to a date night at home with me. To his credit, he did inform his family of our plans. But that night Rob's mom decided to have dinner next door. Typical Italian mother: She moseyed over to our house 'just to say hi,' waving around a big dish of homemade gnocchi—Rob's favorite meal. I could see his resolve was weakening. So I glared at him as if to say, *Don't even think about it.* He pulled me aside and gave me those big puppy-dog eyes. 'What do you want me to do?' he asked. 'Tell my mom to leave?' As a matter of fact, *yes!* Seems he'd rather disappoint *me* than rock the boat with his mother."

"Don't get me wrong: I'm close with my parents, too. But in my family, we respect one another's space. My mother will call and say, 'We miss you—how about we get together next weekend?' whereas my in-laws are like, 'Surprise! We're on your doorstep!'"

"I think this prevents Rob and me from being as close as we could be. I can't remember the last time it was just the two of us, relaxing and talking. Yet Rob won't stand up for our privacy. How can our relationship grow with all these people crowding around?"

Update: How they're

Seven years and three kids later, Rob reports that he and Yvonne are enjoying the riches of a great marriage *and* a loving extended family. "Yvonne and I are a true team now," he says. "And she's grown close with my mom, which is a real joy to see." Yvonne adds that Rob makes her feel special. "The other day he said, 'How about you and I go celebrate tonight?'" she recalls. "When I asked what the occasion was, he replied, 'I just love being with you!'"

Photos: Yvonne and Robert: Melissa Barnes; Hair and makeup: France Pierson; Photo, Carolyn: courtesy of Carolyn Bushong; Text: Lisa Maxbauer.