

Standing Up to Hate

Sam is going over to their friend Jake's house for dinner. They have known Jake and his family for several years, and they get along with Jake's family well. When Sam goes over for dinner, topics are usually lighthearted, ranging from sports to music to local news. This time, however, the discussion takes an unexpected turn. Jake's father launches into a diatribe in which he makes a variety of derogatory remarks about other groups, such as "women should know their place" and "gay people should be ashamed of themselves". Sam is taken aback, as they have always thought of Jake's family as tolerant and accepting. Even worse, before they can think of how to respond, Jake's younger brother chimes in to agree with his father. To Sam's disappointment, Jake simply stares at the table in embarrassment. Sam knows that what is happening is wrong, but is unsure of how they should respond to the situation.

Part of Sam wants to confront Jake's father and brother, as they feel that it is their responsibility to stand up against hate whenever and wherever they see it, and to correct the problematic assumptions that underpin such remarks. They also think that they have an opportunity to educate this family, showing them that such remarks are not only harmful but inaccurate. If they do not take this opportunity, who else will? Additionally, Sam is worried that if they remain silent, Jake's father and brother will feel empowered to continue making such remarks, to the point where it will be too late to change their views, or even change their minds about expressing such views.

Another part of Sam feels that it is not their place to confront Jake's father and brother in their own home. They feel particularly conflicted about confronting Jake's father, as they have been raised to respect their elders. Sam also believes that they have a duty to be polite and show their appreciation for being hosted for dinner. Furthermore, Sam worries that confronting Jake's father and brother will create an uncomfortable situation and put a strain on Sam's relationship with Jake's family. And for all Sam knows, standing up to Jake's father and brother could backfire, causing either or both of them to become defensive and even more convinced that their views are correct.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. To what extent, if at all, should we put aside our moral principles when a guest in someone else's home, and why?
2. How, if at all, would your analysis of this case change if it was Sam's family rather than their friend's family expressing these views?
3. How, if at all, would your analysis of this case change if you learned that Sam was a member of one of the groups being targeted in this discussion?

