

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-drive/car-life/auto-therapy/this-regular-joe-is-behaving-badly/article1568126/>

Auto Therapy

This 'regular Joe' is behaving badly



Misuse of handicap parking spaces is morally reprehensible -- but he doesn't

Published on Friday, May 14, 2010 12:01AM EDT Last updated on Friday, May. 14, 2010 11:05AM EDT

My partner uses a handicap sticker when driving his elderly mother around, but he also enjoys the benefits of rock star parking by using it when she's not in the vehicle. This behaviour is a deal-breaker for me. I've tried reasoning with him, but he thinks it's a non-issue. What can I do?

- Over the Line

Your man is not the first person to pull this trick - but he is in good company. There was once a B.C. politician who was perennially late for meetings. This person had a penchant for parking in spaces near the legislature which were designated for the disabled. At first this individual attempted to justify it by saying no one was using the spaces, but the MLA did eventually qualify for a permit.

Has your partner thought about how his behaviour affects the disabled? He's joined a select group of people without disabilities who frequently try to justify parking in designated spaces. A recent study in Boston found that one third of those using disabled placards did not actually qualify. Some even had the gall to use or renew permits which once belonged to friends or relatives who had passed on. Their list of excuses included the assumption that they thought no one needed the parking spaces, or the fact that they were "only running a quick errand." Meanwhile, there's a good chance a disabled person was circling the block at that very moment.

Those who qualify for permits may require extra width to get in and out of their vehicles when using a wheelchair, crutches, or a cane. Or, perhaps they need to park close to a building

entrance because health issues prevent them from walking long distances. A doctor's recommendation is required to be eligible for a permit. The fact that it's illegal to park in a designated space if you're not disabled should be obvious to any driver. There are unwritten exceptions to the rule. Only the most heartless police officer, for example, would issue a ticket to a driver without a permit using a designated space to drop off someone who required the use of multiple assistance devices. Life-threatening emergency situations would clearly qualify, too.

Not only is your partner's behaviour socially unacceptable - it's morally reprehensible. Is it driven by fear or lack of understanding of disabilities? Is it yet another manifestation of the selfishness which seems to be rampant in contemporary culture? Are the motorists who illegally park in disabled spaces also the ones who drive single-occupant vehicles in the HOV lane? Dennis Leary describes this behaviour in his famous and appropriately titled song *I'm An A**hole*. But who knows? While your man is behaving in an unacceptable manner today, perhaps he is also on the leading edge of a trend. As the baby boomers age over the next decade or two, maybe his tomfoolery will be less noticeable when parking lots are over half full of disabled stickers.

Have you reminded your partner that by abusing the permit, not only is he jeopardizing his relationship with you, but also his relationship with his mother - not to mention her well-being? His misuse of the permit could cause it to be revoked indefinitely.

If he cares for you, and using the permit appropriately is all he needs to do to keep harmony in the relationship, he should take your advice. However, it sounds as if you've given him a chance to change his behaviour and he isn't responding. If you're uptight about this sort of thing, and he's the kind of person who is inclined to deviate from socially responsible behaviour, it's time to sit down and have a serious talk. Your value systems may be too far out of alignment to reconcile. How honest is he when it comes to other issues? How does he behave on business trips, or at tax time?

Regardless of his justification, what he's doing is illegal. If all else fails, you could always take the law into your own hands. Speaking of deal-breakers - if he doesn't straighten up, report him to the enforcement authorities in the province where you live. If you decide to do so, I'll look forward to your next letter.