

Letting Go of a Friendship

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They say that breaking up is hard to do—and everyone knows it's true—when it comes to lovers. But what about breaking up with a friend? While it may be hard to admit, sometimes we need to leave a friendship.

This can be particularly hard for women. Taught from childhood to make and nurture relationships with other people, women often believe that ending a friendship is tantamount to admitting they've failed at a core task.

However, there are many different reasons friendships end, and many ways to ease the pain of separation. The following list may not be “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover,” but it is 24 things to consider when you need to leave your friend.

Be conscious.

1. **Genesis of friendship.** When and how did your friendship begin? Was it born of history (grade school, summer camp), joy (first dates together, first babies together), or from adversity (divorce at the same time, illness)?
2. **Your life.** Has your life changed? Have you moved, or entered a new phase of emotional growth? Or is the fact that nothing's changed the problem?
3. **Your friend's life.** Take a look at what she's been experiencing lately. Have there been problems or life shifts that you haven't acknowledged?
4. **Outside events.** Things happen that neither one of you can control; take these into consideration when you're making the decision to end a friendship.
5. **Type of friend.** Jan Yager, PhD, a noted authority on friendship, addresses this topic in detail in her book *When Friendship Hurts*.
6. **Life patterns.** It doesn't matter whether you're dumping or being dumped—has this happened before in your life?
7. **Friendship phases.** Yager says there are different stages in friendship, and knowing which one you've reached can help you reach a decision.
8. **The afterlife.** How will your life be different if this friendship is gone? Consider what will change: schedule, support system, emotional needs, etc.

Be careful.

- **Awareness.** Is your friend aware that there's a problem? If not, do you need to let her know? Try to avoid one-way communication for this, such as e-mail.
- **Opportunity cost.** If you choose to remain friends, what toll would it take on you? On your lifestyle? On others in your life?
- **Down the road.** Yager and other experts emphasize that it's possible—and desirable—to leave the door open if you can for later friendship.

- **Vendettas.** Experts also realize that some relationships are toxic, and believe you should stay alert to the possibility a former friend may do ugly things.
- **Betrayal.** If a longtime friend has an affair with your spouse, the betrayal is clear. But what about a friend who sabotages your self-esteem?
- **Consider others.** Who else will be affected, especially other friends? Sometimes ending a friendship affects family members and/or colleagues, too.
- **Enlist support.** You don't have to gossip, but you can turn to other friends to help support your decision and remind you you're not alone.
- **Be decisive.** When you're trying to be kind you can twist yourself into a pretzel with vague promises. Instead, be kind to yourself—end things clearly.

Be confident.

- **Move on.** Stow your photo albums and old e-mails (if this sounds similar to breaking up with a romantic partner, it is) and make a coffee date with another friend.
- **Know your limits.** Any ending can be painful, and you may need time to grieve. Don't force yourself. "You need to allow yourself to feel bad, sad, whatever, about it," says Yager.
- **Respect others' limits .** Mutual friends may need time to renegotiate boundaries with the 2 of you.
- **Provide closure, as appropriate.** If a friendship is over and you both know it, shake hands—or do something similar to show that you've both moved on.
- **Learn more about friendship.** "Needs for friendship may change throughout your life," says Yager, whose book, *Friendshifts*, deals with this topic.
- **Nurture your present relationships.** Look at the other friends in your life and celebrate their presence, contributions and needs.
- **Keep the door open.** Yager and other experts on friendship agree that since life changes and so do needs for friendship, when possible you should stay flexible—a friendship that doesn't work now may work well under different circumstances.
- **Never give up on friendship.** Repeat after The Osmond Brothers: One bad apple won't spoil the whole bunch. Friendship is one of life's great rewards.

Resources

Jan Yager's publisher's website:
www.whenfriendshiphurts.com

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