

TIME-OUT: THE FRIENDSHIP SURVIVAL GUIDE

Your friends are a huge factor in your life. They're the people you lean on when you're upset, they help you remember not to take yourself so seriously, they have your back when you're in a tough spot, and they're a major source of fun! But such close relationships are bound to have their share of challenges. In fact, nearly 100 percent of girls polled for this book said that **trouble with friends is a top source of stress**.

Friendship Problems

I could fill a book about the complexities and stresses in friendships, but here are some basic survival tips for staying sane in the midst of common friendship dilemmas.

FRIENDSHIP FIGHTS

Considering how much time you spend with your friends, it's no surprise that just about every friendship goes through occasional conflicts. Friendship fights can get ugly in a hurry, especially when one or both parties tries to get others to take sides, or plays dirty by completely ignoring the person they're fighting with.

Though friendship fights will undoubtedly cause you stress, here are some ways to keep things in perspective and make your conflicts, and resolutions, as painless as possible:



- **Don't get others involved.** When a disagreement between two people turns into a group fight, sorting things out can be one huge mess. While you need to be able to share your feelings with your other friends, there's a big difference between doing that and trying to convince others to take your side.
- **Don't get sucked in to other fights.** Likewise, when you're not involved in a situation between two friends, don't contribute and make it *your* fight by choosing sides. You can be a sounding board without putting in your two cents.
- **Take a step back.** When you're in the midst of a friendship clash, the emotions can be intense. Give yourself space and alone time to reflect on the situation and your role in it and figure out what you hope the outcome will be.
- **Be patient.** While tiffs between friends can be over in a matter of hours, more serious fights can take days, weeks, and even months to resolve. If you're feeling especially hurt about something that happened in a friendship, take the time to get over it and get distance from the situation. By jumping back into a friendship before you've gotten over the hurt, you're bound to face the same challenges again down the road. Likewise, if you're over it but your friend isn't, be patient and give her the time to fully recover.
- **Write about what's going on.** Friendship challenges can leave you confused, insecure, and shell-shocked. Treat your journal like your new best friend and write down every last hurt feeling about the crisis. Getting it down on paper will be a source of emotional release, and it may also help you work out a creative solution to repairing your relationship.

LOVE AND CRUSHES

When you or your BFF has a serious thing for someone else, your friendship may be a casualty. Who hasn't gotten blown off by a friend when her new love interest suddenly took center stage? The rule of friendships may be "friends first, significant others second,"



but that's not always the way things go down. Here are some suggestions for dealing with matters of the heart:

- **Two-month rule.** Be forgiving of a friend who puts her new beau before you in the first two months of a new relationship, and ask her to give you the same leeway when the situation is reversed. But once that "honeymoon period" is over, make sure to put your friendship and relationship ratio back into balance.
- **No last-minute ditches.** Make a pact among your friends that no matter what's going on with a flame, you won't pull a last-minute change of plans and leave a friend in the lurch.
- **Make dates with your friend.** Significant others aren't the only ones who need to go on dates. Make sure to set aside time for just you and your friend (no boyfriends or girlfriends allowed) to hang out and do the things that are special to the two of you.

Friends in Need

When a close friend goes through a difficult time, it can be hard on you, too. You probably want to support her, but it's not always easy to know exactly what to do. No matter what the situation, here are some guidelines for being there for a friend:

- **Be there or be square.** This may seem obvious, but sometimes friends need to actually hear the words “I’m here for you if you need me” before opening up.
- **Listen well.** Listening is more than just saying “uh-huh” and nodding your head on cue. To be a good listener, focus on what your friend is saying, count to three before chiming in to make sure your friend has finished her thought, and have your talk face-to-face instead of over IM or a cell.
- **Don’t judge.** When a friend shares her stressful situation with you, the last thing she wants is to feel judged or as if you don’t approve. Try to keep your judgments, and unsolicited advice, to yourself, and instead focus on giving your friend what she needs in the moment. If she wants your advice, be honest *and* tactful.
- **Treat your friend.** A little distraction can be a great thing. If your friend is super stressed out, why not surprise her with a little gift or a getaway to the mall or the movies?

CREATING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

When a friend goes through a difficult time, do you find your own mood sometimes shifts right along with hers? Do you become preoccupied with your friend’s situation and try to ease her pain or come up with a solution? Do you feel like it’s your job to make your friend feel better?

There’s a big difference between being there for a friend and feeling responsible for your friend’s happiness. But it can be challenging to draw healthy boundaries, especially if you’ve got a friend who’s used to leaning on you in a crisis.

To create healthy boundaries in your friendships, follow these rules:

- Make sure you spend time with your friend where you **talk about things other than her crises**. If you notice that every time the two of you are together the conversation goes back to the same place, it’s okay to ask her if you can have a break from talking about the challenge for a while.

- **Don't contribute to the drama.** Let your friend know that while you understand how upsetting her situation is, you know she is strong enough to get through it. Instead of using end-of-the-world language like “that’s outrageous” or “how can you stand that?” use phrases like, “that’s a tough situation” or “it’s a bummer you have to go through this right now.”
- If you’re taking on too much of your friend’s stress to the point that it’s starting to affect you, it’s fine (and actually necessary) to take a step back from the situation. **Be up front and honest** with your friend, and explain that while you want to be there for her, you need a hiatus for your own well-being.

Knowing When to Draw the Line

When the dynamics of a friendship are creating more stress than good in your life, it might be time to evaluate the relationship and decide whether or not it’s worth keeping around. Now, I’m not saying that friendships should be all sunshine and cupcakes 24/7. But they should be a source of positive energy—they have to bring something of value to your life, and you have to like the person you are when you’re with that friend. Most important, you should feel like your friend will be there when you need her the most.

To find out if it’s time to reevaluate a friendship, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I act differently or not like myself when I’m with this friend?
- Do I feel good about myself when I’m with this friend?
- Am I getting something positive out of our relationship?
- Is there a trust bond between us?
- Do I ever feel like my friend is using or taking advantage of me?
- Would my friend be there for me if I reached out to her when I was in a jam?

- Does my friend show interest in listening to things that are important to me?

Depending on your answers, it may be time to make some changes. If you're unsure about what to do, try talking with the friend in question and share your concerns with her. She may be unaware of the imbalance and be more than willing to pick up the slack.

JOURNAL IT:

Sit down with a friend, write out these statements in your journals, and then swap with each other. Take your time completing the statements about your friendship, return your journals, and read each other's responses. You'll both gain some valuable insight into your relationship!



1. I'm lucky to have you as a friend because you are . . .
2. One of my favorite friendship memories with you is . . .
3. I'm happiest about our friendship when . . .
4. If there is one thing about me you'd be surprised to know, it would be . . .
5. You make me feel special when you . . .
6. One of your best qualities is . . .
7. Sometimes I get frustrated when you . . .
8. I value our friendship because . . .
9. When I'm feeling upset, the thing I need from you the most is . . .
10. When I think about our friendship twenty years from now, I imagine . . .