



WHEN BEST FRIENDS BREAK UP

DISCONNECTING FROM A BUDDY CAN BE PAINFUL AND CONFUSING. WE'VE GOT WAYS TO HELP YOU DEAL.

BY TAMEKIA REECE

The two of you spend every minute together, and no matter what, you know your friend has your back—or so you thought. You never imagined your best friend would become your ex-friend!

In high school it's normal for some friendships to evolve while others dissolve. We don't have to tell you that this is a confusing age. "Your values,

preferences, opinions, personality and interests change," says John Townsend, a psychologist and author of *How to Be a Best Friend Forever*.

When it comes time to put the "end" in friendship, it can be painful: You think you're right; your bud thinks you're wrong. Feelings are hurt, tempers flare, insults are flung back and forth, and pretty soon, you can no longer stand to see the face of

the person with whom you once spent every waking moment.

Although friendship breakups are usually messy, experts say they don't have to be. These tips will help make the trek through "Splitsville" a little less bumpy.





THE PROBLEM FIZZLING OUT

You thought the two of you would always be close. But since winter break, you haven't seen much of your pal. You're not in the same classes, you rarely bump into him in the hall, and—now that he's in the school play—he's spending all his time at rehearsal, while you stay busy with football practice.

Sometimes, friendships die out because the two of you move in different directions or no longer have much in common. And sometimes, they just lose wind. That's what happened to Oliver, 14, of New York City, and his friend Dan*. They had been best

bros since kindergarten. But over time they started seeing each other less and less, and it wasn't clear if their schedules had put their friendship on pause, or if they had just grown apart. "I didn't dislike him," says Oliver. "He just felt distant. We weren't as close anymore."

NOW WHAT? MAKE TIME

If you feel a friendship fading, don't assume that it's dead for good. Maybe Oliver and Dan's bond would be rekindled just by seeing each other more often.

If a change in circumstances is what's putting the brakes on a friendship—maybe you don't have any classes together this semester, or the sports team you were both on just ended its season—you'll have to put in some extra time to keep your bond strong. Consider joining a club together, scheduling a weekly movie night, or making plans to meet up for lunch. The transition from every day to every-now-and-then can be hard, but it won't kill the friendship if you put in a little work.

HOLD YOUR HORSES

Sometimes a friendship can fizzle even if you see your bud all the



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FRIENDSHIP PET PEEVES

You may want to get rid of these bad friendship habits—before your friends decide to get rid of you.

THE CLONE

It's normal to have a lot in common with a friend. But dyeing your hair to match hers and drawing matching freckles on your face may be taking it overboard.

THE ONE-UPPER

When your bud tells you about the touchdown he scored yesterday, you tell the story about the time you scored two. If you're constantly stealing your friend's thunder, he may not be your friend for long.

DEBBIE DOWNER

Of course you should be able to vent to your buds! But if you have a permanent dark cloud over your head, your friends may go looking for someone less gloomy.

"ME, ME, ME"

Somehow, the conversation always comes back to you. Making yourself the star of every interaction will quickly have you flying solo.

THE FLAKE

Sometimes things come up and you have to cancel on a friend. But if breaking plans becomes a habit, your friend may stop making them.

time. But if things seem less than peachy, don't jump to conclusions. It's normal for friends to bump heads or need time apart, says Julie Klam, author of *Friendkeeping: A Field Guide to the People You Love, Hate, and Can't Live Without*. "Sometimes someone is just in a bad mood, or there was a misunderstanding," Townsend says. "Lots of relationships can be saved if you say something." Asking your friend what's going on, or even sharing your own issues, may help salvage the friendship—before it fades away.

BACK OFF

Even with some extra time and effort, some friendships will still

change no matter what. But that doesn't mean they have to end. Sometimes friends just need a little breathing room, and though it can be hard to give, it can actually strengthen a friendship. When people feel forced or pressured into something, they tend to resist, Klam says. That means if you keep trying to regain the friendship you once had, your old pal may put even more distance between you two. Of course, continue to be supportive if your friend needs a sympathetic ear or helping hand. However, if she refuses to tell you what's up, or her behavior toward you is still chilly, give her some space.



THE PROBLEM FIGHT CLUB

Ashley, 13, of Littleton, Colorado, has always had a big group of friends. In fact, she and her six besties used to do almost everything together. However, "one of the girls was always going back and forth about whether she liked me or not," Ashley says. When the girl finally made up her mind, this so-called friend convinced the other girls to dislike Ashley too. But they didn't just stop being close—the girls became downright mean. "Everyone would get up and walk away when I sat down at the lunch table," says Ashley.

If a friend is overly competitive or quick to give backhanded compliments or do other things that make her seem like your **nemesis**, she's probably more of a frenemy than a friend.

NOW WHAT? DON'T PLAY TELEPHONE

As soon as two friends say adios, rumors start flying about how it ended and who "dumped" whom. No matter how it went down, there's only one good way to deal with gossip. "Don't pay attention to it," says Josh Shipp, a teen-behavior expert and author of *The Teen's Guide to World Domination*. "Know who you are, who you are not, and surround yourself with people who make you feel good about being you."

NIX ANY PLANS FOR REVENGE

Your ex-friends hurt you, so you can hurt them back—right? Nope. "Revenge seems like a good idea, but never is," Shipp says. Spilling secrets or other **retaliation** plots may feel fair,

but always make you look bad. "You have a choice," Shipp says. "Will you get bitter or better?"

DON'T MAKE MUTUAL FRIENDS CHOOSE SIDES

It's only natural to want backup if you feel you've been wronged, but you have to be careful when you and a former friend share mutual buddies, says Klam. Asking your pals to take sides puts everyone in an awkward situation, and you risk losing the friends you still have. "When you and a former friend hang out with the same people, you've got to find a way to coexist," says Klam. That means no stink eye, no sarcastic comments, and no silent treatment. You don't have to like her, but for the sake of your other friends, you should be able to be in a room with her.

THE PROBLEM BOILING POINT

Ireland, of Watertown, Connecticut, was close with her BFF, Savannah*. Eventually, too close. "She didn't want me to go anywhere unless she was invited, she would get mad when I talked to other friends, and she tried to isolate me by lying to others about me," says the 13-year-old. To regain her sanity, Ireland had to say goodbye to the toxic relationship.

Whether a friend is too needy, a bad influence, or you simply aren't feeling it anymore,

severing ties can be difficult. However, there's a way to do it without causing World War III.

NOW WHAT?

BE DIRECT

Rather than ignoring your former bud or suddenly unfriending him on Facebook, be upfront and tell him it isn't working out. Who knows? The feeling may be mutual. Either way, you want to end a friendship, not start a war, so be

respectful of his feelings.

Instead of playing the blame game, make it about you, Shipp says. Telling a soon-to-be ex-friend that it's all her fault isn't going to help. Rather than saying, "You're boring," try something like, "I want to surround myself with friends who share more of my interests."

KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

Never relay a breakup message through a friend—it's cruel and cowardly. So is spilling the beans on why or how your friendship ended. The only people who need to know the details are those involved, Shipp says.

POST-BREAKUP BLUES

No matter how a relationship ends, it can hurt. Here's how to cope:

• THINK IT OVER

Don't let history repeat itself! Every friendship should teach you something—even if it's what *not* to do. Realizing what went wrong can help you avoid similar friendship failures in the future, Townsend says. You can't prevent yourself from ever getting hurt again, but you can learn ways to avoid it.

• CRY IT OUT

Even if you're the one to call it quits, it's normal to feel sad or frustrated when a friendship ends. Don't be embarrassed to cry, vent, or even write an angry letter to your ex-BFF (but just write it—DON'T send it!). Townsend says allowing yourself to grieve is healthy, and it will clear your mind for the next friendship.

• SHOW LOVE

When you lose a friend, it's important to remember the ones you still have. Not only will it make you feel better, but you'll become a better friend in the process. Consider what they do that you appreciate and try to treat them the same way. "Be the sort of friend that you want to be friends with," Shipp says.