

3 tips for navigating a complicated friendship

Take a class together: “(Do) something that is ongoing so you don’t just meet once for coffee,” says girlfriendcelebrations.com founder Dawn Bertuca. “It’s something you can look forward to and something you’ll continue to develop in common that has nothing to do with whether you have children or not.”

Remember birthdays: Parents often let their own birthdays come and go without fanfare, but friends without kids often still have the time (and disposable income) to toast their big day. Don’t assume your friend has adopted your birthday policy. In either case, your friend will appreciate a card or phone call.

Listen: “It’s important to remember not to talk about your kids all night,” Bertuca says. “On the other hand, if you don’t have kids, be patient and let your friend talk about their kids a little bit.”

Is it time to end the relationship?

When a friendship starts to feel like all work and no play, it may be time for a break. But think twice before calling it quits.

“Be very cautious,” says Irene S. Levine, author of “Best Friends Forever.” “Rehearse in your mind what you want to say, and say it very gracefully so you don’t hurt any feelings. That leaves the door open if your life situation changes, and you can pick up where you were.”

“The life of a mother is so much in flux, but before you know it that baby will be in nursery school and then elementary school and you’ll have time you never dreamt you’d have,” Levine says. “If you don’t nurture the friendships you had, you’ll find yourself bereft of friendships when you want them most.”

Likewise, a child-free friend may join the parenting ranks later and want the advice and friendship of her pals with kids.

“Don’t close any doors,” Levine says. “Once you break up, there’s no going back to the same relationship you had.”

— H.S.

other words.

“Girlfriends remind us who we are before we had kids,” says Dawn Bertuca, co-owner of girlfriendcelebrations.com, a Web site that encourages women to cultivate their friendships. “You’re trying to have adult time, trying to maintain the person you’ve always been. Children add another dimension, but you should still try to relate to your friends in pretty much the same way.”

For guys, who tend to relate less through phone calls and e-mails and more through shared pursuits, face time with friends becomes even more important.

Which is partly why Trapp and her husband established a weekly routine that answered a number of friendship challenges.

“My best girlfriend, who is kid-free, and I started ‘Survivor’ night, where every Thursday night during the ‘Survivor’ season, we alternated who was responsible for dinner and we all got

together at my house,” Trapp says. “My husband and I would feed the kids dinner, get them ready for bed, and once they were all settled in, we’d set the table and push play on TiVo. It was a couples night.”

Bertuca says standing dates — whether it’s a weekly class or a weekly TV show — are ideal. “You have to put it on the calendar and make it a priority,” she says. “It has to be scheduled.”

Rogers’ friend Felicia now has two kids. While the friendship has certainly changed, Rogers says it remains strong.

“It hasn’t been easy at times for either of us,” Rogers says. “I don’t call her late at night after a horrific date. I don’t get to see her as much as I would like. But we e-mail during the week and we always speak to one another on the phone at least once a week. Even if I am crazy busy at work or she hasn’t slept for four days, we call just to say hi and hear the other person’s voice.”

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The Parent 'Hood *Where moms and dads share their expertise*

How to teach children to stand up for themselves

Your 8-year-old never stands up for herself among friends or siblings. How do you keep her from getting walked all over?

Parent advice

Help bolster your child’s confidence by involving her in activities she enjoys. Also, discuss situations where she failed to find her voice and help her practice what it sounds like to speak up.
— Dawn Lantero

We had the same issue with my 8-year-old, who was tallest in her class last year, being picked on by the smallest in the class. We encouraged her to stand up for herself, and if it didn’t work, to tell the teacher. As a last resort we pointed out that, if need be, she is larger and could get up and walk away or put out her hands to push away the offender.
— Naheed Attari

Expert advice

Before you set out to embolden your child, determine if she is unhappy with her lot in life.

“It can be a mistake to assume that something that bothers most children also bothers your child,” says Erika Carpenter Rich, a child psychologist in Los Angeles who runs social-skills groups for children. “Parents need to discern whether it is because their child is picking their battles — a good thing — or not recognizing when their rights are violated — not so great.”

“For example, some children don’t mind giving away their dessert and never getting anything in return. Maybe dessert is not important to them, or maybe their reward is seeing how happy it makes their friend. This is in contrast to the child who



In a scene from “Ugly Betty,” Betty Suarez, left, goes back in time to relive the terrors of gym class. Watching characters’ problems on TV shows can help parents and kids discuss similar real-life situations.

allows others to take things from them and may not recognize that this is not OK. Or the child who is bothered by these situations but doesn’t know what to do.”

For the latter, Rich suggests the following:

■ **With siblings:** “For minor squabbles, it is important not to step in and to allow your child to have a chance to try to negotiate for herself. Sibling rivalry is completely normal and cannot be avoided — and shouldn’t be, as it provides a template for conflict negotiation with peers. For major disagreements, parents can step in and provide problem-solving options, such as flipping a coin or using a timer for taking turns, listening to each person’s perspective or figuring out how to make amends.”

■ **With parents:** “Do role-plays, either in person or with puppets, to help her come up with the language she needs to stand up for herself. Pick situations that come up frequently. Parents can then do pop quizzes in the natural environment. For example, if your child is not able to stick up for herself when others take her toys, grab her toy during parent-child play and give her

the chance to respond appropriately. This helps her remember how to handle it when it comes up for real.”

■ **With friends:** “You will embarrass your 8-year-old by intervening. Do a post-mortem with your child at bedtime or another relaxed time. Ask her what happened, how she felt about it and what she could do differently next time. Use this situation ... for a new role-play.”

■ **Day to day:** “Point out different situations that come up on television or with others that require assertiveness, and discuss the techniques used and others that could have been used. Be sure to point out how the person’s rights were violated, which indicates the need for assertive behavior,” Rich says.

— Compiled by Heidi Stevens, Tribune Newspapers

Got a solution?

You try to read books to your 10-month-old but she just squirms and eats the pages. Should you wait until she’s older? E-mail us your thoughts at parenthood@tribune.com. (And please include your name and hometown.)