

## IS YOUR FRIEND HARD WORK?

*You thought friends were supposed to be fun, but your best mate wants 24-hour agony aunt, and all your clothes. What do you do when your mate takes, takes and takes?*

Last month my friend Kate's boyfriend dumped her. Tears? She could have flooded rivers. She bent my ears so bad; they still stick out oddly now. But I'm a good friend. I know there are times in every girl's life when she really needs the firm but gentle shoulder of her best mate.

So I spent an entire week confined with Kate in the soggy recesses of her bedroom. I endured hours studying the memorabilia of her defunct relationship, listening to her misery, making steaming mugs of hot chocolate and watching her eat packet after packet of Digestives.

By Saturday she was beginning to feel better. Great, thought I. I was more than ready for a wild and wicked girl's night out. Besides, it was just what Kate needed.

And then it happened; I was just squeezing myself into an ultra-short A-line mini, when Kate telephoned. I wouldn't be swinging my pants that night. Kate had twisted her ankle and was in need of more tea and sympathy.

The following week Kate flunked an English exam, got a detention for passing notes in class and left her new coat on the bus. I provided all the support, encouragement and advice I could muster over these crises. Then, to cheer her up, I lent her my favourite purple velvet jacket... and she splattered it with tomato juice.

Now I've had enough!

Kind, patient, caring person that I am, there are limits to my tolerance - and Kate is trampling her size 4s all over them. I'm not a rotten friend, but there has to be more to friendship than being a full-time nursemaid, counselor and tissue-provider. Right?

### **A walking disaster**

We've all got a Kate. The friend who turns up in the middle of the night desperate to talk, the one who calls you, whimpering, umpteen times a day. She is the Walking Disaster, the Constant Calamity, the friend to whom you can't say NO.

Kate is what's known as a High Maintenance Friend. And although I always think to myself «poor Kate», I also can't help wondering, could she be playing some part in causing her calamities? I mean, who else has six crises a day? OK, I'll admit that being the strong one in the friendship makes me feel great in some ways, but Kate's roller coaster of mishaps and dramas also leave me feeling exhausted and resentful. What's more, when I have difficult times, Kate hardly acknowledges them.

So why don't I just get rid of this selfish so-called friend? Well, it's just not as easy as that. Kate and I go wa-a-a-ay back to primary schooldays. The thought of abandoning our shared history is too much to bear. Besides, the old boot's a scream - sometimes. Life without her is unthinkable. But life with her is hardly a giant, bottomless bowl of Haagen-Dazs either.

### **The coward's way**

Sadly, when we feel burnt-out by a friend, most of us take the coward's way out and just avoid them. Anything, it seems, is better than hurting a friend by telling them how we really feel. So we start by not returning calls (sound familiar?), then we make arrangements and cancel, with elaborate excuses, at the last minute. It's feeble, pathetic, lily-livered - I should know, I've done it enough times!

The trouble is, that brand of chum rarely seems to catch onto 'subtle' measures. When I started seeing more of my other friends, I hoped Kate would get the message and back off a bit. Instead she just got upset and even more clingy.

### **The end of a friendship?**

Sometimes the only thing to do with such friendships is to end them. If you can stomach the guilt, you may feel mega amounts of relief in the long run. But if there's something there worth salvaging, try doing what I did.

All really wanted was to take the pressure off myself, so I decided Kate and I needed a gentle hear-to-heart. It was risky - I didn't want my old mate to feel totally rejected, so I started out by making it clear how much I value her.

Then - deep breath - I explained that she needs more from me than I can give. I suggested that she talk to other friends as well as me when she needs support. The silence and Kate's frozen stare seemed to indicate that this could be the point where our friendship would end. The longer her silence lasted, the more I talked to fill the air, finally convincing myself that I was a really crap friend.

Kate didn't call me for days after that, but when she did phone about a week later, it was the happy, fun Kate I know and love. Sure, I heard about the latest saga in her life, but not for hours. And she actually... asked questions about me!

These days, Kate has a network of new friends, and the balance in our relationship is getting better. Now when I see Kate, I really enjoy her company - and she's happier too.

No one is saying you should only love your friends when they're up, and cross the street to avoid them when they're down. But when you're doing all the giving and your friend is just taking, it's time to weigh it up. Remember: you have a fight to say NO!

### **You know your friend's hard work when...**

- Your conversations all seem to involve her.
- You often feel angry and frustrated when you spend time together.
- Your other friends question your undying loyalty to her.
- She rings you five times a day and sulks when you don't return her calls.
- You never seem to have any fun together.
- She makes wounded little comments whenever you see other friends and don't invite her along.

### **If you think you're a hard work friend...**

- Back off and give your closest chum a little more space. No one likes to be crowded, and you might just enjoy some independence!
- Ask her about her life, too. Let her know you're there for her when she needs a sympathetic ear.
- Avoid rushing to the phone every time you have a crisis. She doesn't have all the answers!
- Spend time with other friends, so she doesn't feel like you're lost without her.
- Chill out and have a laugh sometimes. It doesn't have to be all doom and gloom y`know.
- Don't be paranoid every time your friend goes out with other people, and not you. It doesn't mean she hates you! No one can spend all their time with the same person.

## MAKING UP DIALOGUES

### Task1: Act out a conversation with a friend to the following topic.

Your boyfriend (girlfriend) abandoned you. He (she) just walked away without a word of explanation. You can't make head or tail of the reasons of this separation. Will it be correct to ask him (her) a straightforward question or it may make the situation still worse? You are at your wits end, desperate for advice.

#### Use the following word combinations:

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|---------------------------------|--|
| -Feel totally rejected          | - How are you feeling these days?      |
| -Haven't the slightest idea     | -Have difficult times                  |
| -Whose fault...?                | - Hurt..... by rude remarks            |
| -Get rid of...                  | -Haven't you by any chance..(done)...? |
| -Merciless, so unfair...        | -Why should you.....?                  |
| -We used to... together         | -In any case you should...             |
| -Life without... is unthinkable | -You shouldn't give up.                |

### Task2: Act out conversation between your friend and you.

Your friend is complaining about feeling lonely and rejected. She is a newcomer in her new school and nobody welcomes her (him). She (he) is desperate to talk, to have a network of new friends, to become part of her new class. You are patiently analysing the situation trying to work out a proper line of behaviour

#### Use the following word combinations:

- |                                       |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| -...an endless stream of strangers... | -Don't be paranoid every time when... |
| - It doesn't work out!                | -If you need a sympathetic ear...     |
| - ...whatever I say or do...          | -Be patient...                        |
| - ...be totally indifferent to...     | -Why don't you ...?                   |
| - ...quite unapproachable...          | -Give it some time...                 |
| -...keep oneself to oneself...        | -In the long run...                   |
| - It is too much to bear!             | -Don't you expect too much?           |

### Task3: Act out a conversation with a close friend to the following situation:

Your Mum (Dad) has recently lost her (his) job. It was respectable and well paid and she (he) feels really bitter about being unemployed. Nobody knows how long it would take to find an equally satisfying position. You feel anxious about your shared future.

#### Use the following word combinations:

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|---|-------------------------------|
| -...completely broken.                            | -What's the problem?          |
| -...look and feel emotionally miserable.          | -Why should you?              |
| -I keep wondering why...                          | -Whose problem is it anyway?  |
| -If I knew... I would.                            | -Leave... in peace            |
| -...attend evening classes.                       | -Be patient...                |
| -...get enough qualifications to get another job. | -It really hurts when...      |
| -...much more successful.                         | -Let's hope for the better... |
| -...much too boring.                              |                               |
| -...get very annoyed every time.                  |                               |

### Task4: Act out a conversation between you and your closest friend.

Your friend has failed his... exam and now he is to pass it again in the near future. He thinks it is just bad luck and is very bitter about his teachers being so unfair. You are trying to find out whose fault it really was and work out some practical suggestions.

#### Use the following word combinations:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| -Everybody is so unfair.               | -Calm down! Are you sure....?          |
| -I can't stand it any more. You see... | -You can't expect too much from...     |
| -I feel so humiliated.                 | -I'm afraid I don't have answers to... |

-I'm falling apart.

-Life will never be the same.

-What about ... ing?

-Keep trying! It's not the end of the world.