

Help! I've outgrown my best friend!

Nothing lasts forever. Seasons change, children grow up, we move to a new neighborhood, or we discover we need reading glasses.

Close friendships, too, can change like any other part of our lives. Perhaps you've noticed you and your best friend don't have as much to talk about anymore, or you just don't enjoy your get-togethers as much as you used to. Or you find yourself annoyed by habits of hers that never bothered you before.

What's happened? Think back to how you became best friends in the first place. Have the commonalities that initially drew you together now changed? Were you childhood next-door neighbors? College roommates? Co-workers? Were you single, but now one or both are married? Or did you meet when married, and are now divorced? Are you different people now than you were then? If so, what's different?

Are you growing personally or professionally and it seems your friend is not? Have you gone back to school to get a degree, and your friend seems unenthusiastic? Or do you and your friend habitually go shopping or overeat together, and you have decided to start saving money or lose weight? Is the problem the activities you do together, or the relationship itself?

Perhaps this is a case of "growing up and growing away," where your life paths naturally separate. Perhaps she has children and you don't, and all her other friends are also moms. Maybe you've developed philosophical or spiritual differences. Whatever the reason, an important part of your life is changing and it may be painful.

What should you do? That depends. Have you had a misunderstanding, and you want to talk it through and be close again? Or are your paths genuinely diverging and you need to let that happen? It may or may not make sense to talk with your friend about the change in the relationship, knowing it might hurt one or both of you. You can still keep her in your life, and at the same time connect with new friends and activities that fit better with where your life is now going.

Sometimes, a friend can develop a behavior that disturbs you (for example, an alcohol or drug problem). If things seem destructive or dangerous, you might talk with her as one concerned friend to another, and offer help if you can. But if her situation seriously disturbs you and she's not ready to address it, then you may have to detach with love, at least for now.

Don't feel guilty if you're the one outgrowing the friendship. And try not to judge your friend for not "keeping up with you." Each of us must travel our own path, and we can't be certain how long, and in what role, anyone is going to be in our lives. But recognize that you are suffering a loss, whether of the friendship itself or of "the way it used to be." Be gentle with yourself as you readjust.

We human beings are constantly changing and growing, and change sometimes brings loss. Whenever we love someone, we risk the pain of losing them. But the alternative would be never loving at all.

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