
What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/08 14:39

Have you ever wondered what has happened to a friend and just not known what to say? Maybe you don't say anything, but just mind your own business. What do you think?

This problem started awhile ago, but has recently gotten much worse. My long time friend has a three year old. She is a single mom who works part time (money is no issue). The child goes to nursery school half a day three days per week. We had not seen each other in about a year as she moved to her home town to be near her parents. We just got together with other friends to catch up. Everyone was looking forward to it. The problem is that she would never engage in any conversation without her child. Every minute she was talking to him, playing with him, or in some way engaging his attention. Most people allow their children to play with their toys or run around and play with each other, but she remained in his midst always talking to him, asking him what he thought about this or that. It was quite alarming.

The only day a couple of us could all join in for lunch, she prepared the child's lunch in advance, so I thought he would eat first, but she held on to it so he could eat with us and then she read stories from a book to him during the entire meal. I was shocked. She later thanked me allowing her to do that and I was honest and said that my mother always taught me that it was rude to read at the dinner table. She didn't seem to like that.

Later when we went out to dinner she wanted to take the book to the restaurant, but the child asked her not to. She still insisted on telling him stories during the meal. She only said a few sentences to the adults, but just talked to the child and told him stories. She said that was the only way to get him to eat, which was not true.

At night she says she must go put him down to sleep, but it took about 2 hours. We were ready for bed ourselves at that point.

I tried to get up early to talk to her, but he was awake and all she would do is follow him around to talk to him and ask him questions.

In the afternoon, I thought we could all talk on the beach while he played in the sand, but she took off in her car with the child going sight seeing and shopping.

She even insisted that he join in and play card games with the adults. He is a smart child but I just think all that attention is some how not healthy for him. I don't even feel as if I had a visit with her at all. The adults seemed stunned and not sure how to take it.

If I call her on the phone, she only speaks a few words before she is talking to her son. She can't even talk 3 minutes without engaging him into the conversation.

I know other people must be thinking what I think. This woman used to be a very dynamic, intelligent, interesting, engaging, politically minded professional. That person has been abducted and we have been left a stranger. Do I say anything or mind my own business?

Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by KPW1956 - 2007/05/08 15:13

I wonder why she accepted the invitation?

It seems that she is isolating or depressed. Maybe her values have shifted a bit and she is just enjoying her maternal side much to everyone else's surprise.

I think she could enjoy both...but maybe is just having trouble assimilating both. Can depression cause this? Is fear or extreme love driving her to totally engage him at others expense? Is she just being sensitive that he is the only child there? Maybe she wants him to be the center of attention.

What you describe does seem a bit overboard. Seems she didn't get the hint when you mentioned the reading at the table being rude. He is a bit young to just go off and play by himself while the grownups converse....

People grow apart for various reasons.. Motherhood and priorities can definitely be one reason some relationships shift..

Did everyone feel the same way? Could you all have talked to her in a way that would not have been confrontational and out of concern for her? Maybe she would have felt defensive if she felt her mothering skills were being attacked.

It's hard to know what is happening and what you could have done and what you could do now? Maybe it's one of those relationships that has run its course until which time ya'll have more in common.

If this was a close friendship, it might be worth having a heart to heart one on one.

Good luck Debby..

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/08 17:26

Thanks for those thoughts, KPW.

She actually hosted this event. She invited us all to come and visit at a beautiful beach house, all expenses paid. She sent all of us many e-mails to ensure we would show up. She seemed sincere when she thanked me for coming and even invited me back next week!

I think the other guest were confused too. There was another guest there with his son, but she wouldn't allow them to play as kids. She had to stay involved with them.

She may be depressed since she moved away from most of her friends. She begs us to come and visit her, but I don't think I can take it.

I used to babysit her son before they moved. She would go out very seldom and stay no more than 3 hours. She never leaves her son with anyone not even her mother overnight. Even then she insisted that you entertain the child constantly. You could not watch tv, read or eat. You had to constantly interact with her son. This was before he was talking. I found talking to an infant for 3 hours quite tiring.

Anyway. I'm going to approach the topic very carefully with another mutual friend who was there too and see how she feels. What I find interesting is that she could have easily arranged for her mother to come down and spend a day or two and watch the child while she had some alone time with the girls, but she chose not to do that.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/08 17:34

You know I just thought about the possibility that she doesn't have much to talk about anymore. Her work now is very limited and I think she is bored with it. Plus it's only a few days a week.

She spends all of her time devoted to her son, so there aren't any social activities without him. The only thing she really talked about was his diet, lunchbox, pre-school, things he said, and maybe 2 sentences about the presidential race.

She doesn't believe in television, so access to that is very limited. Her son watches no tv and she only watches 1 show per week.

So, she doesn't have much to talk about.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by KPW1956 - 2007/05/08 17:40

That does sound confusing. Especially in that she hosted the event..

Sounds like she needed some adult time but is having a hard time integrating motherhood and adult relationships.

In this day and age of all sorts of abusive situations being in the news.. Even with trusted individuals... She may not trust anyone with her child.

I think balance is important. That child will eventually have a hard time associating with his own peers if she can't swing back toward the middle. Maybe she thinks she is stimulating him intellectually?

Who knows.. Maybe she was showcasing her child and looking for affirmation of what a good mom she is being? I've got to think that some sort of flawed thinking is going on... Either depression or elitist thinking... Let us know how you and your friends figure out how to approach her (or not....)..

It does sound like it could be a touchy situation.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by KPW1956 - 2007/05/08 17:49

I see your additional comments while I was writing.

Yeah, that could be the root of the matter. Loss of common ground.

I can't say that I blame her about steering her child away from the tv though. It does have a way of captivating one's time and attention. I grew up with the tv on in our house from morning til night. When my children were young, I often let Sesame Street be my mother's helper and children's video's be a baby sitter of sorts. Of course trying to mix it up a bit... But I could tell you what time Sesame Street was on, what time Mister Rogers was on.. and what my kids favorite videos were. Yes, we did play outside and go to parks... But I got my chores done around the house while they watched tv. If I could I would have done it differently and limited it alot more. Maybe an hour or 2 at most a day..

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by grizzlys4 - 2007/05/09 00:15

Debby,

I agree with KP about balance. Is she so unsure of her mothering skills that she's going overboard to "prove" to herself and everyone that she's a perfect mom and has a smart and perfect child?? Could be.....or does she feel that's the only thing she has now and must define herself solely by this??

Whatever the reasons, it is sad to see such a lack of balance. Neither smothering nor neglect are healthy for kiddos. I think it's a great idea to talk to some others who were invited and who you have that openness with. But there may be nothing to do if she's in that space in her life right now.

It's not healthy for either of them.....our children need proper socialization, and so do we!!!

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/09 11:26

I think both of you are right on point. She is no longer in the mix of our social lives here in the capital city. She used to be very social. Now she lives in a smaller town without many friends. I think she is lonely, but honestly, she can't be a friend to anyone until she can turn loose of her child for 5 minutes. That is probably why she hasn't developed friends there and why she holds her old friends so dear. We love her no matter how she is with her child. New people probably aren't that understanding.

She is a very high achiever as well. She wants the very best for her child, I know that. She chose to have him without a father in his life and I think she may feel that she must now be all things to him. She solicits male friends and family members to offer that male role model in his life.

I'll let you know what my friend says who was there too. She had made a few comments before the trip that now that I look back, make me think she knew what to expect.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/11 15:29

I spoke with one of my friends about the situation I described here. She did notice and feels like I do, however we don't think there is really anything we can do. Our mutual friend is a very strong willed person and we both don't think she would welcome advice on what we perceive as a problem.

I did confirm that our friend does not have the same social activity that she used to have when she lived in our city. She has few friends who are in situations like herself. I think she is so used to operating one on one with her child that she is just out of touch with adult contact.

I did discover that our friend had actually hired a part-time nanny who was working for her to come to the beach and provide care for the child while she was visiting, however, at the last minute the nanny canceled out. Apparently she just totally quit. I suspect my friend's high standards for the nanny were difficult to handle.

I guess we will just try to stay in touch with her and get together on occasion. I'll keep my mouth shut and hopefully, she will come around or her child will grow up and tell her he needs some space.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by mazzy - 2007/05/12 11:08

Debby... I'm just wondering... is it possible for you to make plans with your friend while her child is in nursery school?

I would not bring up the situation as you described here... I would be afraid that it would be perceived as criticism.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/14 11:41

mazzy wrote:

Debby... I'm just wondering... is it possible for you to make plans with your friend while her child is in nursery school?

I would not bring up the situation as you described here... I would be afraid that it would be perceived as criticism.

Possibly. She lives about a 5 hour drive away, so I would have to go during the week when the child is in school, however, she works at her part time job during that time. He goes to school 3 days per week. Perhaps she will hire a new part time nanny and when I go up to visit, she and I can have some alone time. She begs me to come visit. I guess I can give it another shot. Plus, if we are in her hometown, her mother or father might babysit for us to go out in the evening.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by mazzy - 2007/05/14 21:04

Debby... I would be honest with my friend and let her know that I'd love to visit if she were able to arrange time for you and her to have some adult alone time. I wouldn't get into criticizing her behavior, but I would make my needs clear.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/15 16:38

That is the direct approach and she is a direct approach person. If the roles were reversed, she would have no problem telling me what she thought.

I intend to go visit in July. I am going to talk to her about childcare in advance to see if she has a new nanny and how involved her family is in babysitting. If she doesn't have something in place, I may just ask if there is someone who she could get help from so that the ladies can go out and have some adult time. If she says no, then I will say to let me know when that happens. I mean is it unrealistic to expect some adult time under the circumstances?

I hope this goes well.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by mazzy - 2007/05/23 13:04

Debby wrote:

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I hope this goes well.

I believe "some adult time" is always a realistic expectation. We all have choices and we all have the ability to make compromises. I'm a direct type of gal... I was never into reading minds... LOL, however, I have learned to be delicate in communicating my needs so as not to offend people I care about. Respecting your needs as well as your friend's needs... and visa versa are key.

Let us know how it goes.

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Re:What happened to my friend?

Posted by Debby - 2007/05/23 13:15

Thanks Mazzy. I will.

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