

Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

Give friends room to have a bad day

My friend texted me at 5 a.m. — then followed up with an email.

In both messages she apologized for a reaction from the night before. Another mom had acted self-righteous toward her, and she took it out on me.

I wasn't angry because I knew her response was out of character. Still, I appreciated the apology. I was glad she reached out.

I called my friend later to assure her we were good. "Don't worry about it one more second," I said. She confessed she'd been up all night long worrying; mad at herself for not handling the situation better.

That part got to me. It reminded me of when I've been in her shoes.

Kicking myself for a bad reaction.

Tossing and turning in bed as I wished for a re-do.

Mentally beating myself up for what I did or said.

We all make mistakes, and truthfully, I've made similar mistakes before. I've been on the other side, and maybe that's why I could respond as I hope my friend would respond to me — with grace, with forgiveness, with a sincere desire to not let a little slip-up ruin a good relationship.

Unfortunately, this is common these days. Slip-ups, tensions and resentments that silently build are eating away at relationships. Among women and teen

girls, one cause is an expectation of perfection. Just as we expect perfection of ourselves, we expect it from those around us. And when they slip, we forget grace.

Pope Francis, with his trademark humility, has defined modern society as a "throwaway culture" marked by disposable relationships. He says we're quick to say goodbye, and I agree. Today's relationships have little loyalty, so it's no surprise why people get clingy and insecure.

Expecting perfection makes it easy to write people off. While relationships certainly need kindness, respect and consistency, they also need grace and forgiveness. Any relationship that lasts long enough will have highs and lows. Learning to respectfully talk things out and love a person even when the feeling fades can keep things afloat when the low points come.

This is how relationships survive. This is how friendships go the distance, lasting 20 years or more.

Recently, I spoke with a woman who mentors teen girls. She's observed that what begins as an issue between two girls often escalates into an issue between two groups as word spreads and people take sides. Someone's feelings get hurt or they get angry, and rather than talk with the person who hurt them, they talk it out with everyone but that person.

This breeds drama.

This blows issues out of proportion.

Issues can often be resolved or partially settled if the two people involved have a calm conversation that's not an attack. Nobody teaches this life skill, yet they should. I've seen relationships restored and strengthened when two people learn to sit down, hear each other out and see the situation from each other's perspective.

Sometimes getting out of our own head is the best therapy of all.

This mentor tells her girls: "Give your friends room to have a bad day. We all get moody and grumpy sometimes, and you have to create space for your friends to be themselves."

Is she giving the girls permission to jump each other's case because they feel salty or on edge? No, of course not.

Just because you're in a mood doesn't give you an excuse to take it out on someone. It doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for forgiveness when you lose it or mess up.

What it means is that our friends need grace like we need grace. Our friends need safe relationships, people who love them unconditionally and won't dump them over every stumble.

We women and girls are tough on ourselves, and that makes us tough on each other. While we can't stop the trend of disposable friendships, we can counter it. We can decide to not be that friend who dumps their friends on a whim by

choosing instead to:

- ▶ Value loyalty;
- ▶ Forgive and apologize;
- ▶ Presume positive intent;
- ▶ Let go of the notion that a "perfect friend" exists; and
- ▶ Remember everyone's life is hard, and when a person acts out, there's often a hidden issue that explains what's going on.

Chances are, someone in your world will stumble this week. They'll mess up and feel terrible, maybe lose a little sleep.

Before responding, remember your mess-ups. Call to mind your mistakes. If someone threw a bone to you, remember that gift of grace. Think of how it felt to realize they wouldn't give up on you.

That's the comfort people hunger for and the security that gets lost in a throw-away culture.

We all have bad days — and we all need friends who allow them. Friends who can witness our messy truths and choose to love us anyway.

That's the friend I want in my corner. And the friend I hope to be.

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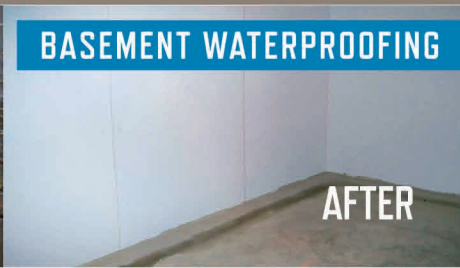


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