

Parenting Solo: Starter Friends

Written by Michelle Greenlee Harris, Columnist
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My daughter hit me with a love-hate moment as soon as I walked in the door a few nights ago. Before I could put my bags down I was pelted with lines like "he made me so mad" and "she knew she was wrong". Topped off by the ultimate "so that's it, we're not friends anymore". Her head was about to go boom.

My first thought - "Good, for once she's not mad at me"! My second thought – "Did she just get rid of a friend over a minor squabble?" Not good.

As I put the cereal and the green beans in the cabinet I kept my ears open and my mouth closed. What I heard disturbed me. Not that I cared about teenagers having a little falling out. What would a teen relationship be without some drama? I was more concerned with how disposable she made some of her friends sound.

We'd already had a mother/daughter chat about the proper way to move on from a friendship. It's a necessary part of life so I don't have a problem with doing it. What I do frown on is just arbitrarily tossing people on the trash heap.

"Unfriending" can be done with the click of a button on Facebook. But the rules of virtual relationships don't translate well into the "real" world. I'm no conspiracy theorist. Still I believe that social media behavior can be the death of face to face interactions. I've told my child many times that people's feelings are very real and cannot be dismissed with the click of a mouse.

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Some people can be considered "starter friends" - friends that fit into your life when you are young and carefree. They are fun while you are in that youthful "center of the universe" bliss. But once you have grown beyond that – graduated from school, started your career, gotten married - these friends no longer fit. You may have to close that chapter of your life and move on.

Not that everyone takes kindly to being left behind. Breaking up a friendship can be much like a divorce – big blowups, the silent treatment and lots of blame to go around. But I believe it can be done well. If a relationship is ripped apart or shattered then it warrants the difficult, but necessary conversations that many of us dread. I've told my daughter that its best to seek closure to relationships that once meant a lot to her.

Sometimes there is no "break up", relationships just fade away. My "bestie" from ages 10 through 18 lives less than 15 minutes from me and I haven't seen him in years. Unless you count Facebook – ironic huh? We never had a falling out, my heart is still full of love for him but our branches grew in different directions. I got married – he didn't. I had a child – he didn't. I got grey hairs – he didn't. Hmmmm. Anyway, different paths took us in different directions.

Ultimately, I want my child to use this teenage spat as an opportunity to learn to "move on" well. Just another lesson she'll thank her old mom for later in life.