



Me-ow! She did that thing that brings out your claws—again.

When Your BFF Makes You Crazy

You're so close that you share clothes and spill sex details, but she also drives you up the wall. Here's how to feel the love again.

BY MOLLY TRIFFIN

► What would you do without your closest friends? No, seriously—they're more than just fun to hang out with; they're also crucial to your well-being. A host of recent studies found that people who have good friends are healthier and happier, live longer, and feel like the challenges they face are more manageable.

But if really tight friends are so good for you, why do they often annoy the hell out of you? Surprise, surprise: Your closeness is actually the root of the drama. "It's easy for

casual relationships to be placid," says Michael P. Nichols, PhD, author of *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships*. "When you start opening up, the potential for conflict inevitably increases."

Once both of you let your guard down, you can see what the other person is like when she's not on her best behavior...and some of it is not so pretty. You know: She'll call you at work to dissect her latest dating drama even though you told her you have a crazy day or she'll get seriously offended by a minor thing, like your not being able to hang out for a week. But there are ways to untangle those tricky love/hate dynamics.

Why the Bond Gets Frayed

Of all the relationships you have in your life (with acquaintances, best friends, family, and your significant other), close friendships can be the toughest to navigate—at least when it comes to dealing with those little annoyances that work your last nerve. That's because your good friends occupy an in-between spot on the intimacy spectrum. Your connection is way deeper than it is with casual contacts, yet it's not as solid as the ties you have to relatives and your partner.

If an acquaintance acts like a bitch occasionally, Nichols says, it's relatively easy to write it off because you're not very invested in the relationship. A close friend's downsides and occasional flip-outs, on the other hand, have a greater effect on your life. You actually care what happens to her and to the relationship between you.

So you care, you're invested...and yet, there's nothing tangible that binds you to friends. "You have blood ties to your siblings and parents—no matter what happens, they will always be your family," explains Yvonne Thomas, PhD, a psychologist in New York specializing in relationships and self-esteem. "And with a romantic partner, your physical intimacy and the promise you've made to be together make you more likely to either work out or put up with traits that irk you." While

FRENEMIES CAN MAKE YOU SICK

Our blood pressure is higher around friends we have mixed feelings about than it is around people we outright dislike.

SOURCE: BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDY

You, Even Better

you're loyal to your closest friends, you're also not inclined to be as tolerant or forgiving.

Taming the Friendly Fire

Okay, she's doing it again: her super-needy phone calls or her last-minute canceling. You may find yourself venting to other friends about her or even feel tempted to pull the plug altogether. But there's a reason you became close to begin with, so before doing something you might later regret, take these steps toward making your relationship better.

Start by assessing whether there's anything *you* should do differently. "People often fail to recognize how they might be contributing to the problem," Nichols notes. For example, before blaming a friend for being bossy, ask yourself whether you really speak up enough. Then make an effort

to express your desires more firmly for a couple of weeks and see if things between you improve.

No change? In that case, you have to confront her. And we have a plan for doing it in an easy, totally relaxed way. First of all, timing is key. "Bring up the issue the very next time she does whatever it is that annoys you," Thomas suggests. "It's possible that she's not even aware of her behavior, so you want to catch her in the act." By pointing it out in the moment, she will be less likely to deny it or react defensively.

It's also a smart idea to sandwich your complaint between two positive statements, Thomas recommends. Say you have a friend who tends to ramble on and on about herself and you can never get a word in edgewise. Tell her, "I'm really glad that you confide in me so much, but sometimes I feel like I don't get a

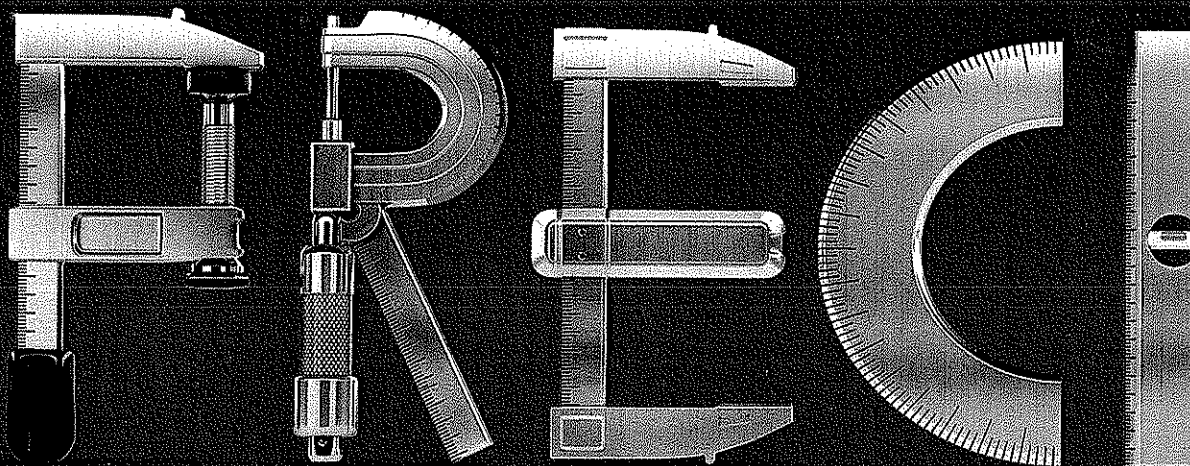
chance to talk about what's going on with me. I care what you think and would love to get some feedback from you." Then make changing the situation seem like a team effort you are both in on by adding, "Let's try to have more of a back-and-forth between us when we talk."

Another option is to take your relationship down a notch. If a close friend has a big mouth but is a ton of fun to be around, consider making your connection with her more casual—a B-level friend instead of A-level. You would still go out together to parties and bars, but she's not someone you would turn to for confidential advice.

Where to Draw the Line

If things still don't get better after you have approached her about what's bothering you, then it's time

 **TOYOTA**
moving forward

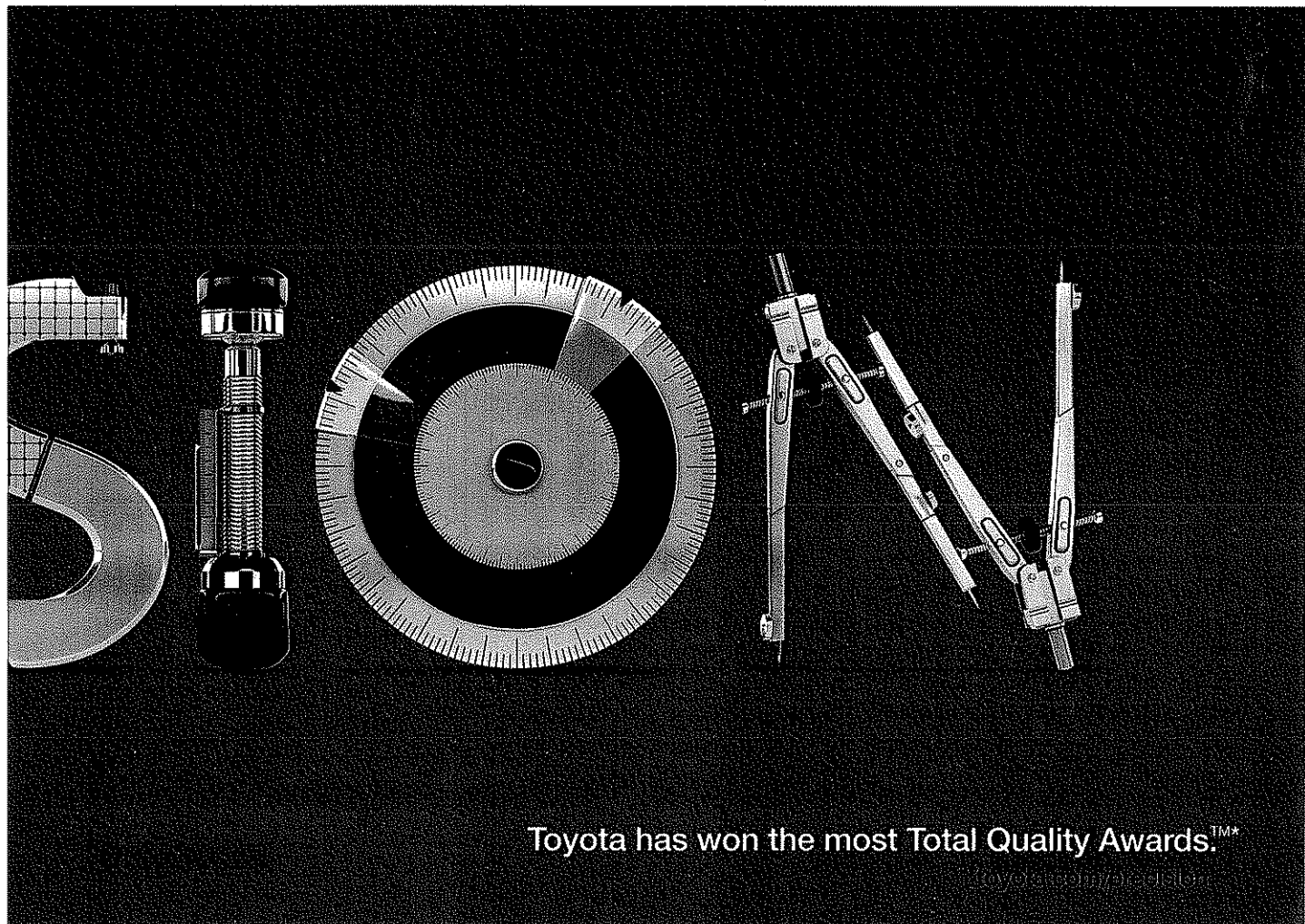


to consider whether you still want her as a friend. Ask yourself if the positive parts of your relationship outweigh the negative. She may be moody, but are you willing to live with that in return for her other great qualities, like her generosity and trustworthiness? Ultimately, it's up to you to decide: Can you put your annoyances aside or has the friendship run its course?

There's one absolute deal breaker though. "A friend who wishes you ill is toxic, and you must drop her," Thomas warns. For instance, if she's uncontrollably jealous of you or isn't happy when good things happen to you, chances are slim that she'll be able to move past such malicious emotions. And having someone in your life who's not on your side will only make you feel crappy. Better lose the bitch and focus on friends who do really have your back. ■

Friend Offenses You Shouldn't Put Up With

- When you and your boyfriend broke up, she stopped by his apartment with fresh-baked chocolate-chip cookies and a shoulder to cry on.
- She loves your taste in fashion so much that she's constantly borrowing your clothes...and "forgetting" to give them back.
- You never make plans with her without having a solid backup option, because you know there is a very good chance that she won't even show.
- Once while drunk, she admitted that she likes to hang with you because she feels skinny in comparison.
- When the lunch check arrives, she says, "Can you get it? I just bought a new Coach purse, so I'm low on cash today."
- She returns your calls only when she has less than a minute to talk, like she's about to walk into the bank.



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