

q advice: NAVIGATE JEALOUSY

How to navigate jealousy in friendships

The green-eyed monster can have a toxic impact on any friendship. Have you ever achieved big success, like landing an amazing new job, and instead of being supportive your friend starts ghosting you? Or perhaps when you go out on the town, your friend gets furious if you're given any attention from the opposite sex? This could be jealousy or envy at play, and if unaddressed, it can rot your friendship faster than a dateless man Tinder swiping on NYE.

When is Jealousy a problem?

First of all, let's be clear, it's not a sin to feel admiration of what others have achieved. The Dutch call this type of envy *Benijden* or benign envy – which is a normal part of life that motivates us to strive for good things ourselves! Where this goes wrong is when one's awe tips over into resentment and the person engages in toxic behaviour – the Dutch call this little sucker *Afgunst* – or malicious envy. This means there is malicious intent, including wanting to see another person fail, and/or taking actions to harm their chances of success.*

How do we know if someone is being jealous/envious? Jenvious...

A friend who is toxic can be hard to spot – sometimes the toxic behaviour is as obvious as a slap in the face with a wet fish (bullying, name calling, teasing). Other times the behaviour is covert and subtle, like passive aggression, saying back-handed compliments, subtly belittling you in front of others, undermining you, and generally causing you to walk away from the interaction feeling worse than before you entered it.

Why does toxic jealousy matter?

The problem with the covert behaviour is that it confuses biological systems that send us into chronic states of stress. Like fight and flight. Your brain has this wonderful nerve called the polyvagal nerve (that's pronounced 'vague-al' not 'vag-al'...) – it's the thing that makes you faint around blood and gives you the "heebie-geebs" gut instinct when you're around someone dodgy.

The problem with being around a toxic 'jenvious' friend is they confuse your poly-vagal response. Instead of only triggering around an obvious threat – like a robber or a fan of pineapple on pizza. It gets triggered by someone who is supposed to be your friend (non-threat) behaving like a threat – all unconsciously to you! The vagal nerve loses its precision at spotting threats and starts firing chronically!** This wildly messes with our fight-flight response and sends us into chronic-stress-ville (i.e., ever laid in bed at night reliving that conversation with your jealous friend. Ending up anxious and wide awake – that's chronic adrenaline and it's not good for you).

What do we do about jealousy?

This can be a hard one. If your friend hasn't communicated to you that they are jealous, you are making an assumption. It can be difficult to say to someone, 'I think you speak to me rudely because you are jealous of how clever I am.' That is not likely to go down well... You need to trust your friend will open up about their insecurities on their own.

If they aren't big enough to be honest about this then the next best thing is to just stick to the facts and don't make assumptions about motives! This means recognising what a 'real friend' is and setting boundaries that you can stick to if and when they behave in an unfriendly way.

Instead of saying 'you're being rude because you're jealous' (i.e., assuming motives), say 'please don't tell me to shut up' (i.e., calling out the bad behaviour with no reference to the motive!) By just sticking to the facts of calling out the behaviour, you don't risk getting yourself in hot water about making assuming's about why they did that behaviour.

Remember - You are not responsible for the behaviour of others

Ultimately, the take home message is this: If you happen to be fit, successful, smart or good-looking, there is nothing you can do about people being jealous of you. There is no reason why you should bring yourself down for that person. Being arrogant is a different concept, and rubbing good fortune in someone's face is never a good look. But genuinely just being successful in life is not a sin. You should not have to tear yourself down, or play down your own successes because of other people's insecurities. Certainly, you can be sensitive to them, care about them and be supportive. But if a friend is bringing you down because they are jealous of you, for your looks, money, success, smarts, career, then this constitutes a toxic friend who lacks trust, support, affection and respect – and it may be time to break up!

Neuropsychologist Hannah Korrel is the author of *How to Break Up With Friends* (Impact Press \$24.99) and has spent over a decade becoming an expert in why the brain makes us do the things we do. A fierce mental health advocate, Hannah brings neurology and psychology together to explain common life dilemmas, minus the BS. Hear more from Hannah at www.hannahkorrel.com

* Lange, J. & Crusius, J., 'Dispositional envy revisited: Unraveling the motivational dynamics of benign and malicious envy', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 41(2), February 2014, pp. 284–94.

** Amy Banks, *Wired to Connect: The surprising link between brain science and strong, healthy relationship* (2016)

DR HANNAH KORREL

HOW TO BREAK UP WITH FRIENDS

FROM FRIENDSH*T TO FRIENDSPLIT
a guide to ditching crappy companions