

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Ever since she got married two years ago, my best friend Karen never has time for me. Her husband, Robert, resents any time she spends with me (or any of her other friends for that matter). She told me that he pouts and yells when she spends any time away from him. Is there anything I can do to get our friendship back?

-- Alethia

Dear Alethia,

Karen and her new husband have some serious problems that must be addressed now. I can assure you (and her) that the situation will only get worse with time. Robert is immature and insecure and Karen is not wise to give in to his tantrums. Now, can you change that? No. That's their challenge.

You can't solve their relationship problem but what you can do is honestly tell Karen how her behavior has hurt you. Let her know that you really want to get your friendship back on track. You might even begin by suggesting that Robert join the two of you for some activity – lunch together or all three to a movie. If you're married or dating someone, you might consider "double dating."

I don't see these approaches as an attempt to placate Robert's controlling behavior but, rather, they give him an opportunity to get to know you and/or your significant other. Perhaps, if Robert has his own friendship with you, he will feel more comfortable when Karen spends time with you. Remember that these suggestions are only a way to *begin* to make changes. You and Karen should be able to do some things on your own, just as you did before she was married.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, Karen would be well advised to have a heart-to-heart with Robert. She can let him know that she loves him very much but that he'll have to work on his insecurities. She can remind him that marriage is supposed to be a bond, not a prison. Healthy relationships allow proper space for each partner to grow, follow his/her own interests, and have meaningful friendships with other people. Anything other than that is unhealthy and indicates that someone in the partnership is something of a control freak.

Regardless of the underlying reasons for wanting to control others, the controlling behavior has to stop. Robert may have serious abandonment issues that stem from a dysfunctional family of origin or other painful life experiences. He may feel terrified when Karen spends time with others but he expresses it through pouting and yelling instead of honestly discussing his feelings. We can have compassion for Robert's "inner child" and the difficult path he has traveled but, nevertheless, inner children make very poor marriage partners.

When someone tries to run other people's lives, or is threatened by the healthy independence of those close to him, they end up driving people away, thus, confirming their unlovability and, in fact, creating situations in which they will be "abandoned." This sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy and only makes the fears and controlling behavior

worse for the future. It's a vicious cycle. Robert has a personal responsibility to heal that wounded part of him and grow up.

Karen might need to work on her own assertiveness skills if she feels uncomfortable telling Robert how she feels and what she expects. I suspect that this is difficult for her, because the situation wouldn't have progressed to this point if she had been more direct earlier in their marriage. The first time Robert threw a tantrum because she wanted to spend time with you or another friend comes to mind as the best time for this conversation to have taken place. Still, it's better late than never.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com