

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I love my friend Betty but she's driving me crazy. She is incredibly bossy and always tells me what to do and how to do it. I used to be able to just let it roll off me, but it's gone on for so long now that I'm ready to blow. She constantly tells me how to raise my kids, what I should tell my boss, and how to do everything from cooking to gardening. What's worse is that she is always saying this stuff in front of other people. She's a wonderful person and would give me the shirt off her back, but never stops with her advice. Speaking of advice. Can you give me some about how to tell her to lay off without hurting her feelings? Thanks!

-- Caroline

Dear Caroline,

I'm sure Betty means well (bless her heart) but you have to find a way to stop her bossy behavior with you. It sounds like your friendship is at stake.

Controlling people are usually insecure and codependent. Perhaps, it is easier for Betty to try to manage your life than it is to take care of her own. But what is most important is to let her know how her behavior is affecting you and your relationship to her. "Betty, you know I love you and our friendship is very important to me. It would make me very happy if you would stop telling me what to do all the time!!!"

Seriously, don't actually shout that last part. Tell Betty that you believe she means well (if you actually think that is true) but her constant advice giving is getting in the way of your friendship. Let her know that in particular, she should cease and desist from carping and calling out your errors (in her opinion), or offering a better way to do things when you are with other people. Remind her of this wise Arabian proverb, "Never give advice in a crowd."

What is most important is to let her know that you value your friendship but that you are an adult and will make your own decisions. She may have some thoughts and ideas and – when you ask for her advice – it is because you truly want to know how she might handle a situation. But unless you specifically ask for her counsel, she should put a sock in it.

Be prepared for denials from Betty. It's amazing how many bossy people are not self-aware. She is quite likely to respond with, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't do that." Forewarned is forearmed. Be ready to give some specific examples of recent times when she has bossed you around.

Keep your cool. Keep in mind the positive things she brings to your life as a friend. Be willing to forgive her past transgressions. At the same time, be certain and strong about your need to have a friend who is not so controlling and critical.

The fact that you are writing about how to handle this situation strongly suggests that you value Betty's friendship. If this were not the case, you would have written her (and her nit-picking) long ago. If and when she changes her behavior, let her know how much you appreciate it. Help her to understand that you are able to make your own choices and that her advice, when asked for, is a gift of soul and that you appreciate it.

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.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.