

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**A few months back, I said something stupid and cruel to my good friend Cynthia. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I wanted to take them back. I could see the hurt in her face but she didn't say anything. I tried to make light of it and said, "sorry about that." Ever since then, I can tell that things aren't the same between us. When I ask her if anything is wrong, she says "no," but I don't believe her. She doesn't call me like she used to. She says she's "busy" and hardly has any time to do the things we used to do together. I really miss her. What can I do to get our friendship back the way it was?**

**-- Annette**

Maybe your friend Cynthia is waiting for a real apology, one that comes from your heart; not just a perfunctory "oops, sorry."

For whatever reasons, she might be unable to tell you how she feels: that you have hurt her feelings, and she's ticked off.

I'm not defending Cynthia. She has a responsibility to be honest and authentic with you. If she is angry with you – and her behavior suggests that she is -- she'd be better off to muster up the courage to tell you so.

Her behavior is non-assertive and passive-aggressive in that it appears she is expressing her anger to you, but she is doing so indirectly, by cutting you off and being unavailable.

It's too bad that she just can't tell you how she's feeling. But, unfortunately, lots of people – especially women – have difficulty with the straightforward expression of angry feelings. After all, the social role for women (though it is slowly changing) has always emphasized being conciliatory and avoiding conflict, even though a confrontation of sorts—an open airing of one's feelings--is the only way to get over this kind of relationship problem.

If Cynthia wrote to me, I'd suggest that she take a deep breath and honestly tell you how she's feeling and how your words hurt her. And it's true that words have great power and can wound our hearts deeply. But Cynthia didn't write me, you did. So let's focus on your part of this scenario, and what you can do now to try to right the situation.

I'll take you at your word, that what you said to your friend was, indeed, "stupid and cruel" and all you offered her was a quick "sorry about that." Frankly, Annette, that doesn't sound like the kind of serious and heartfelt apology that's essential to heal a friendship when your words have cut your friend to the quick.

The great British writer, G.K. Chesterton, had an interesting observation about less-than-sincere apologies. He wrote, "A stiff apology is a second insult. The injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt."

If you've hurt your friend, it will heal both of you to honestly fess up. Here's what I recommend:

Call Cynthia and ask her to meet with you. Face-to-face communication is the best way to apologize and ask for forgiveness. If she puts you off and says she just doesn't know when she could meet with you because she's so busy, yada, yada, yada, then you will have to have this conversation by phone.

Tell her that you are aware of how your friendship has changed since you said this cruel and stupid thing. Don't make excuses for your behavior. And be specific. Say that when you said that cruel thing, you immediately wished you could take the words back, but of course, you couldn't.

Tell Cynthia that, in spite of her claims that nothing is wrong between you, you feel that she is angry, and that you can understand why she might feel this way.

Tell her how much you value her friendship and that your life doesn't feel good or the same without her in it. Be honest. Ask her to forgive you.

Then give her an opportunity to speak her mind. You can't make her talk, but you can give her the space and love to know that she can express her angry feelings. By asking, and then listening to what she has to say, you are showing that you value the relationship enough to hear her response without becoming defensive.

This is the way to start the process of healing your friendship with Cynthia. Then you must be patient. Remember that all healing and the rebuilding of trust takes time. We can't rush the outcome simply because we want things to be the way they were.

Rebuilding trust is like planting a garden. You can put the seeds in the ground but they will grow at their own speed. But that doesn't mean you should sit idly by.

In your garden, you can pull out weeds and make sure the young plants have plenty of water and sunlight.

In your friendship, you can cherish the relationship and let Cynthia know how important she is to you. You can give quality time, honesty, and soulful feeling. You can use this experience to raise your consciousness for the future, by being more careful about saying cruel things.

There's a lot to learn from this experience, but learning doesn't mean beating yourself up because you made a mistake. Forgive yourself just as you are asking Cynthia to forgive you.

There is every possibility that your friendship with Cynthia will rise from this difficult estrangement and become better than ever.

*Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949*

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