

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**I have a friend who drives me crazy with her “baby talk.” I’m not talking about her goo-gooing to an actual baby here. She speaks in this high-pitched voice, using babyish words in meetings at work and at our bridge club. This is not her normal speaking voice, but she talks like this a lot even though she’s thirty years old. She’s a good person and except for this incredibly annoying behavior, I like her. But, it’s hard for me to be around her without telling her to STOP!**

**– Pulling my hair out**

Dear Baldie,

The undulating, sing-songy, and exaggerated form of speech that adults use to communicate with infants provides a rich learning environment, and is excellent for a baby’s developing neural system and language skills. Research has shown that many people also use this form of communication with their family pets. Interestingly, the rhythmic speech patterns of “baby-talk” are heard all over the world, and in every language. But except for these two circumstances – when talking with babies or asking Rover if he wants a wittle biscuit -- or unless one is doing voice-over work for an animated feature film, baby-talk in adults is annoying and out-of-place just about everywhere else. (“May I have the balance statement on last month’s fiscal pwoblems, pweeze.”)

It is most likely that your friend is immature and insecure. She may feel that this way of behaving is “cute” and childlike. Some women believe that this kind of coyness makes them more “feminine” and “sexy” but, in fact, your friend’s behavior is more likely to be turning people off than on. She doesn’t seem to be conscious of the impression she is making on you (and others as well, I’ll bet). In any case, your friend’s behavior is preventing the development of real, authentic adult relationships – at least with you.

Often people put on these kinds of affectations in order to get attention from others. Her baby-talk may be an attempt to attract attention, and is a compensation for low self-esteem. Unfortunately, what she is creating is negative attention, and when she perceives other people avoiding contact with her, her self-esteem will suffer another blow. Then it’s off to the races. Low self-esteem leads to more attention-seeking, which leads to a blast to self-esteem, which leads to even more attention-seeking. It’s a vicious cycle -- but you can help her get break it.

I suggest you let your friend know that you care about her and give her reinforcement for the things that she does well. Build her confidence and self-esteem by honestly sharing your feelings about her wonderful qualities. This can (and should) be a civil conversation that comes from the heart. I suggest you have it soon so that you don’t jump up from your next bridge game screaming “STOP!” as you yank tufts of hair from your head, (which your letter suggests you may be on the brink of doing).

Instead, kindly and gently tell her that her baby-talk is distracting and annoying. Let her know that her behavior keeps you from getting closer as friends. If her behavior

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is so habitual that she doesn't even notice that she is doing it, but she is willing to change, offer to point out her regression to toddler-speak when you notice it, by using a discrete signal that the two of you agree upon.

This conversation might also lead you to ask if there is anything that you do that is annoying to her. (How 'bout that hair pulling problem?!) Be open to hearing what she has to say, and come to an agreement that your friendship will be based on honestly expressing your feelings toward each other. Remember that good friends are hard to find.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) All of the "Your Personal Coach" columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).