

Sally

ALL MY FRIEND TALKS ABOUT IS HER BABY, AND SHE ACCUSES ME OF NOT BEING 'SUPPORTIVE' ENOUGH

I recently fell out with a longtime friend who has a one-year-old son. All she can talk about is babies. I am pregnant and she imposes advice, regardless of whether I ask for it or not. It came to a head when she held a birthday party for her son. I misread the time and was busy, but offered to help out in the morning and spend time with her. We had a huge row when I tried to explain diplomatically that her constant baby chat and advice was too much, and I wanted to experience pregnancy for myself. She got nasty and accused me of not supporting her, which is not true. She bullied me badly when we were children, and I think I've viewed our friendship through rose-tinted glasses, but the truth is she's not going to change. Maybe I should call time?

Oh dear, we seem to have two problems going on at the same time — the baby bore and the narcissistic friend. Of course, for a new mother, the first smile, the first time their child sits up and the first time they use a potty is of endless fascination. It may be understandable, but, let's face it, other people's babies are stupefyingly dull. When I was pregnant, I asked friends for advice, but the crucial word here is "ask". You are quite right to want to experience pregnancy for yourself, and unwanted advice is both intrusive and tiresome. So is the notion that just because you are pregnant, you become public property. When I was at a party and drinking a glass of champagne, a woman (a stranger) came up to me, took the glass out of my hand and said: "Bad for baby." I could happily have decked her, but all I said was: "Bad manners."

There are those who may say that when you become a mother yourself, you will understand your friend's preoccupation with her baby. Well, you might, but after this lesson in how to be a bore, I somehow doubt it. We all have to be sensitive to our friends' needs, and new motherhood is an intensely sensitive time, but there is a difference between having to tread gently and walking on eggshells.

It seems that you are a hostage to her self-absorption, while the rest of her friends have started to avoid her. It is always difficult to challenge our friends, however diplomatically,

but friendship is based on honesty, as long as it is not unkind, and one that is strong enough should be able to endure differences. Yes, it is important to celebrate milestones in our friends' lives, but we're talking jam sandwiches here, not winning a Nobel prize.

It seems that you find it difficult to say no to her, and that she demands that you don't, then becomes plain nasty when you have the temerity to put your foot down. Even the placatory gesture of offering to help organise the party is rejected, because her needs must always come first. I am guessing that, albeit unconsciously, for all these years you have been avoiding her displeasure, so have rarely challenged her. Childhood bullying sets up a spectrum of behaviour. Either we run, and feel resentment even when we are adults, or we become overly attached and continue to seek approval, putting ourselves in second place.

Should you call time? Perhaps it might be more constructive to take a step back and consider the friendship without those rose-tinted glasses. Is it one of empathy and support; does it bring you happiness? Too often we continue with relationships out of guilt, history and sentiment. Reconciliation may be possible if she is able to see her part in things. If not, it could be wise to let go. A friendship should be one of mutuality, rather than playing hand-maiden to somebody else's ego. ♦

Follow Sally on Twitter at @SallyBrampton

If you have a dilemma, please send a short email to Sally at sally.brampton@sunday-times.co.uk.

We're sorry, but Sally cannot answer letters personally

SALLY'S RESCUE REMEDIES



JUST THE ESSENTIALS

I have a depressive illness and GPs always ask if I take fish oils, by which they mean omega 3. Its remedial ingredient is EPA, which can help stabilise mood, but only if your intake is 1g a day. High-street brands often contain negligible amounts, and I worry about contamination because of fish-farming methods, so I am pleased to have found one that is high-potency and ultra-distilled: Pharmepa E-EPA 90. £30 for 60; victoriahealth.com

THERE IS NO CHARM EQUAL TO TENDERNESS OF HEART

Jane Austen

FINDING HAPPINESS

The Happiness Hypothesis is a brilliant book, one of my all-time favourites. Every time I lend somebody a copy, it gets nicked. Part of the positive psychology movement (which emphasises mental health, rather than mental illness), it is erudite, but far from dry. *The Happiness Hypothesis* by Jonathan Haidt (Arrow £10)

