

## **HOW TO KILL A SICK FRIEND**

**Sue Klaus**

Sometimes having a sick friend is such a drag. They always need something. Sometimes they're weepy, and they complain all the time. But there are ways to get rid of this nuisance once and for all. The object is to "dump the whiner." So, just follow these helpful steps: Never, ever call them. And don't return their calls. Even if they are still occasionally calling you, they're so sick that they will lose their momentum and eventually stop. After all, even if they listen to your problems, you certainly don't want to hear theirs.

- Be harsh with them; say mean and spiteful things, especially when they seem vulnerable. Remember, even if they were there for you in the past, the idea is to get rid of them now. The sick and afraid are particularly sensitive to cruelty, and the more you use, the better.
- Write them out of your life - don't tell them about social events, especially parties you are holding. And if they actually try to have one themselves, don't show up, and don't RSVP. That way they'll be wondering if you are coming right up to the very last of the party.
- Never invite them to join you for lunch, or a concert or a show. That would only make them think you cared.
- Never call just to say hi and see how they're doing. And never ask them if they need anything at the store when you go.

These techniques will definitely kill them, one way or another. They will definitely kill the friendship; and even if they don't kill physically, psychological, emotional or spiritual murder also counts. If they had the nerve to go and get sick, it's not your problem.

Remember, some sick people have some hope that anyone cares. These are the toughest, so you must remember to stick with it. Don't let them wear you down, and whatever you do, don't break down and care. You'll never get rid of them that way.

### **HOW NOT TO KILL A SICK FRIEND**

The previous section, is, of course, not what really happens. Very few people actually plot out moves to kill sick friends and family. Unfortunately, the end results of thoughts and actions are the same. It is important to realize where these thoughts and actions come from, in order to change the end results.

There are differences between disabilities that originate at birth and disabilities that happen later. Both cause tremendous problems with our image of that sick or disabled person.

There is great grief when a child is born with physical and/or mental impairment. Even before a child is born, family and even friends have a predetermined image of

- what the child will look like
- what life will be like with the child
- what they will be like
- even what they will like to do, or how they will earn a living.

When the dream child doesn't arrive, it seems like instead of the person they expected, a stranger has invaded the house. It is not surprising that the rate of divorce among families with disabled children is higher than the national average.

When the illness or accident occurs later, there is not only the grief of family or friends, but now the particular disabled person has their own grief to sustain as well. They have lost so much, it hurts just to talk about it, because it overwhelms them and anyone who will listen.

## **GRIEF**

Grief and loss accompany chronic illness and disability, but unless you're affected, you may not realize the impact. Let's take a look at what can be lost in chronic illness and disability:

Self-concept	Dancing
Friendships	Fitness
Freedom	Travel
Family support	Driving
Confidence	Work
Sports	Activity
Dependability & Reliability	Money
Hobbies	Fun
Energy	Health Insurance

There are also additions to life that are not welcome:

Assistive devices	Pills
Hospitalizations	The Social Security Disability System
Doctor bills	Medical system run-around
Conflicts with employers	Family doubt, grief, fear

Any of these alone would be definitely uncomfortable - combine them and you have a very bleak picture - without friends to stand by you.

The process of rebuilding after such a big change is a decades-long task. It is a series of two steps forward, three back that gradually, over years of time can improve. But it is

easier, faster, and more rewarding when you can share even the smallest victory with a friend.

### **THE "F" WORD - FEAR**

This is the main reason why you will not act on your impulse to remain a friend. Because of the changes that have occurred, you are confused and feel helpless in the situation. You don't know what to say, what to do - so you say or do nothing. It is less work to let a friendship die than to keep it alive.

But you're a busy person - you have responsibilities. Where can you find time for someone who seems to need so much? If there was any time to spend with them before they were disabled, then you have to decide to make time again - if you are a friend.

But hospitals give you the creeps. That's too bad. Let me tell you who's got a worse case of the creeps - the patient! If you think they like it there, think again. Hospitals are not designed for anyone to feel comfortable. Suck it up and go visit.

### **THE "F" WORD AND YOUR RESPONSE**

#### **"I don't want to hurt their feelings."**

This is a common concern, and in some ways it can be hard to avoid. You can try to walk in someone else's shoes, but in truth unless you could actually trade bodies for a week, you will never have an idea what that person's life is like. The trick, I guess, is to learn how to think before you speak. Most adults have to learn to do this at work, in their families. If you think it might hurt someone - don't say it. It's hard to do - but like everything else in life, practice makes perfect.

#### **"What do I say to someone who is hurting?"**

Would you feel less pressure if you didn't have to say anything at all? Then relax, because sometimes the less you say the better. It is more often your actions that will speak for you. And the action of listening instead of persisting in idle chatter can mean so much more to someone that still needs that shoulder of yours, even if it's getting a little soggy. What does it cost to give a hug? What is the price of holding someone's hand for a few minutes? What is the financial expenditure of a mild neck rub, or an arm to lean on as they walk? Once you find that the human cost of not doing these things is much more expensive, you will be ready to be a friend.

#### **"What shouldn't I say?"**

This question has many answers, and many have come from disabled people I know. These may not be hard and fast rules, and may need to be adjusted for the situation, but they end up being universal.

### **"You look great! Or, You're looking much better!"**

This implies that you expect them to feel great, when that may not be the case. Many illnesses and disabilities are invisible, and belie the underlying pain and suffering accompanying them. Instead ASK how they feel, and really listen. Take your cue for further comments about their appearance from their answers.

### **"At least you're not in a wheelchair."**

What you don't hear is the rest of that statement. In response to that comment, the disabled person may think "not yet, anyway - and then I can count on you to say something else hurtful to me."

### **"At least you can still (hear, see, walk)." Or, the classic: "You should count your blessings."**

If you have not experienced the loss, don't assume it's easy to discount one. If you have, you are still too bitter to help anyone yet.

### **"You shouldn't have tried to work two jobs."**

Is it really your call to blame a sick person for their illness? No. Blame is the most worthless concept on the planet. It accomplishes nothing, except to hurt the target. This applies in all areas of life - there is no reason for blame except to hurt someone. Try to remember who hurts most when you blame yourself for anything. And how the situation remains amazingly the same.

### **"You just haven't found the right doctor."**

And you can't understand what chronic illness/disability means. Some illnesses make a person sick for many years without killing them. Pain, trouble walking and working accompany this person every single day of their lives, and there is no end in sight. If anything, there have been too many doctors with too many conflicting answers. The probability of a cure is not an issue - the necessity of living with illness is the only acceptable option. Your acceptance of their reality impinges on the disabled person's acceptance of life with illness/disability.

## **EVEN WHEN YOU TRY, THINGS DON'T ALWAYS WORK OUT ....**

### **What if they say no, they can't do whatever?**

Let's say you asked them to lunch, or for coffee. The person says they are not up to it now. Think about making a contact possible - on their terms. What if you brought over some treat, stayed for a short time, and gave a rain check for an outing for a week later? Maybe they are not able to "entertain" and they feel pressure to entertain people that come over. Can you think of a way to visit and be the entertainment so they don't need to? Can you stop by with some food that can be warmed up later for their dinner, not stay long, and then call them later in the week?

### **What if they say yes and cancel at the last minute?**

This is common with chronic illnesses that ebb and flow, like Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, for example. The person really wanted to go, gets psyched up for it, and when the day comes there is physically no way they can go. They feel bad for disappointing you, and they are disappointed in themselves. They can't control their bodies, and that is frightening.

### **Can you save the day?**

Are you flexible enough to translate their unpredictable health into your talent for spontaneity? Rent a movie and bring it to them. Order a pizza, or pick up sandwiches, and make it a small mini-party. After all, who is going to miss you more - the Eagles or your friend?

### **They have a phone, too - why don't they call me?**

There is a difference in the dynamic when you call from when they call. When you call, you always have something to offer, if only your companionship, a kind word, an errand. When a sick person calls, it is an imposition on your time, and no one wants to impose. They don't want to be a bother, and if they have already had friends disappear into the woodwork, they'll stop calling anyone just in case they feel they pushed others away with "being needy." You need to make the call, and keep making the call.

### **What can I do for anyone?**

Next time you head out to the grocery, try calling your pal and asking if they need a few things, then get them. When you bring them by, no big deal, no dramatics. You may slowly become an angel on earth, but you don't have to tell anyone that.

### **REMEMBER:**

- Make the call
- Keep calling
- Keep asking
- Keep contact
- Don't give up
- Don't give up
- Don't give up

### ***About the Author... Sue Klaus, M.A.***

I am a trained audiologist who worked with the hearing impaired for 11 years, while slowly being affected with the chronic illness called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. More than 15 years after the illness started, I would like to help people keep friendships alive even after life-changing events. I have been on both sides of this dynamic, and have some insights to offer.