

# Design for life

## Our friend's meanness is affecting our relationship

This week, **Fiona Brennan** advises a reader on what to do about a friend who won't put her hand in her pocket on social occasions



### Dear Expert,

I have a friend who won't put her hand in her pocket for anything. She always "forgets her wallet", slips off to the bathroom or doesn't say anything when someone else volunteers to foot the bill. When we divide it after a dinner, inevitably she pays with cash and doesn't put in enough. Several times we've found to our mortification that this means no tip has been given.

Now that Covid restrictions have eased, we're supposed to be all meeting up and celebrating two of our friends' big birthdays (30ths). But recently she sent a text suggesting that we have drinks in her house and asking everyone to contribute €20 euro to her on Revolut so she can buy them. If this was in any of our places, we would never dream of doing a thing like that!

None of us feels able to say anything to her. Where would you start? But if we don't, I think we're going to start losing her as a friend since it's made quite a few of us very angry. It's not like she doesn't have cash - she's in a good job.

### Dear Reader,

Even reading your letter leaves one with an unfortunate and perhaps familiar sting. When a friend is mean with money, it really does burn a hole in the relationship. Most of us will have had one at some stage who exhibited this lamentable behaviour. The convenient trip to the toilet just as the bill arrives, the habit of "forgetting" wallets and the lack of acknowledgement (never mind gratitude) when you pay for them again!

You may have noticed that I said "had one", as people who are tight tend to lose friends quickly. They might have healthier bank accounts, but ultimately they are the ones left feeling empty.

You mention that your friend comes up with absurd ideas such as inviting people over and asking them to contribute to the drinks bill. In my experience, if you are invited to someone's home you will automatically bring a bottle as a gift whether you intend to drink or not. The fact that your friend feels she needs money in advance suggests possible trust and/or control issues.

Unfortunately, meanness is one of the hardest traits to accept in a friendship. It leaves us cold, shattering the very essence of what authentic friendships encapsulate - giving and receiving. No doubt your friend has many lovely qualities, but it can be hard to see them amid the darkness of closed purse strings. If you are the person who is always giving in a friendship, whether that be money or something else, the lack of balance can leave you drained. This is both unsustainable and incredibly disrespectful.

The unspoken message behind meanness is "you are here for me to take advantage of." Currency is an energy source and the word's Latin roots mean "condition of flowing". Like all energy, there needs to be movement from one person to another.

Our relationship with money is often deep-rooted in childhood fears of not having enough. Your friend's tightness is coming from a place of

insecurity and it is important to keep this in mind - but also remember that it is not your job to continually suffer the consequences. You raise the pertinent point that "none of us feels able to say anything to her". In order to help you with that, I have a few questions.

1. What are your friend's positive qualities? Write them all down, putting the meanness to one side for now.

2. How do you feel before you meet your friend, when you are with her and afterwards? Again, put aside how she is with money.

3. Do you feel this person has a genuine interest in your wellbeing and, if so, how do they display it? Again, park the money issue.

The key is in the last question. If the answer is yes, then let's take the next step, as this relationship could well be worth fighting for.

Find a place and time to have an honest conversation with your friend. I suggest a walk in nature where you can gently approach the subject by saying you feel you need to say something for her own good. Begin with listing all of her positive qualities and why you value her. Express how you genuinely care about her, which is why she needs to know the impact her behaviour is having on the group. Be clear that if it doesn't change, she risks being left out of plans. Kindly explain that you don't want her to be excluded and repeat her good qualities. Be honest about how hard it has been for you to speak about this delicate subject.

The reason that those who financially leech off others often lose friends is that most of us are far too polite to say anything. Resentment then begins to fester. Eventually, we just stop inviting that person out or even contacting them.

If you care about your friend, then having the guts to say something is actually an act of love. On the other hand, if you genuinely decide that this friendship is not worth speaking up about, then it will fizzle out naturally. The fact that some of your group are feeling "very angry" is not a good sign.

If you want her to get the message on a night out when the bill comes, you need to be really clear that you are dividing it equally and this must include a tip. Don't be afraid to call her out. Soon enough, she will see that she can't get away with the same old routine. As for transferring money to pay for drinks, simply laugh and say, "I will bring a bottle, don't worry!"

Friendships are truly unique because we get to choose whom we allow into our lives. Sharing and generosity are ways of saying, "I see you, I respect you." In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart." ■

Got a problem or something you'd like advice on? Email anonymously by contacting us via [ask-an-expert@businesspost.ie](mailto:ask-an-expert@businesspost.ie) and we'll match your query with the best expert we can find on the subject. You can also drop an email in confidence to [nadine@businesspost.ie](mailto:nadine@businesspost.ie)



**Fiona Brennan**

a weekly Instagram Live (@the\_positive\_habit) session called Therapy on the Couch every Wednesday evening. Full info can be found on [thepositivehabit.com](http://thepositivehabit.com)

## WHAT I'M LOVING IN THE ARTS AT THE MOMENT

My friend and colleague Dermot Whelan's hilarious and transformative new show *Mind Full*, which seamlessly fuses comedy, theatre and issues around mental health is currently on tour nationwide.