BETWEEN FRIENDS with ESTHER EtiQuette



Dear Esther,
My daughter is treading the waters of preteen life with all the hysterics, squeals and tears. Her latest drama involves her closest friend since first grade, Dina, who seems to have suddenly forgotten their friendship since the arrival of Super-Cool Kayla. Kayla, my daughter tells me, has aggressively courted Dina and has effectively kicked my daughter to the sidelines by convincing Dina that my daughter is "way too immature and quirky" for them. I am quite disappointed in Dina. Why isn't she standing up for my daughter? Where is her loyalty? Do I get involved and call Dina's mother or the girls' teacher? Should I encourage my daughter to confront Dina herself? Or should I just listen empathetically and wipe my daughter's tears?

Signed,
Drama Momma

Dear Momma,
We sure can count on our children to drag us right back to the school playground, can't we? The upside is that this time around we've got 30 plus years of life under our belts and if we can keep our heads cool (despite our aching hearts) we can use these opportunities to teach our children valuable life lessons and their inherent self-worth regardless of what Diva Dina has to say.

In preparing to answer your question, I consulted with Izzy Kalman whose article "A Sane, Effective Torah Approach to Bullying" appeared in the Nissan issue and can also be read at nsheichabadnewsletter.com. Many thanks, Izzy, for your words of wisdom, which I am happily sharing it with my readers.

IZZY KALMAN WRITES:
In a case like this, where your child is suffering, it is tempting to call the school, talk to teachers and principals, or at least to call Dina's mother. But bear in mind that no principal, teacher, or mother can force someone to genuinely be friends with another person. Even if Dina's mother wants to help, and sees to it that Dina invites your daughter over to play and they are fine one on one, problems can still arise in school once Super-Cool Kayla is in the picture.

Which leads me to the most important thing you can do for your daughter. Explain to her that Dina is young and doesn't yet know the value of true-blue friends, and that is a shame. The new and exciting girl has caught her interest and she is swept up in the novelty and attention. It has nothing to do with your daughter! Dina's problem is not her problem. Dina may find her way back to their friendship, but she may not. It is sad to lose a friend, but we can't control other people. What we can do is resolve to never behave this way to our friends, never to cause them this hurt. Encourage and help your daughter to make new friends and find other interests.

I like teaching kids how to solve their problems through role-play. If you are comfortable with role-playing, you can do the following with your daughter. Otherwise just give the advice to her. Let's say her name is Rochel. It will go something like this:

Me: Rochel, you play Dina and I'll be you.

Me [playing Rochel]: Dina, it's not fair! You're spending all your time with Kayla, just because she acts like she's so cool!

Rochel [playing Dina]: Leave me alone! You are such a loser! Kayla is much more fun than you are!

Me [playing Rochel]: No, she's not! I'm just not a phony like her! She has you wrapped around her little finger and you don't even see it!

Rochel [playing Dina]: She does not! She really admires me. I can't believe I've been your friend all along. Even Kayla told me that you are a total loser!

I would keep the role-playing going a little longer, until it's obvious that the situation is going steadily downhill, and then ask:

Me: Rochel, if I act like this, are you going to respect me?

Rochel: No.

Me: Would you want to leave Kayla and come back to being my best friend?

Rochel: No way!

Me: Was I treating you like a

friend or an enemy?

Rochel: An enemy.

Me: That's right. Now let's start over and this time I'll treat you like a friend.

Me [playing Rochel]: Dina, it's amazing how quickly you've become Kayla's friend. She's the coolest kid around!

Rochel [playing Dina]: Yes, isn't she totally awesome?

Me [playing Rochel]: She sure is. But I have to admit, I am a little jealous. You're not spending time with me anymore.

Rochel [playing Dina]: Well, Kayla told me that you're a total loser and I can't be her friend if I am going to hang out with you.

Me [playing Rochel]: She really said that about me?

Rochel [playing Dina]: Yes, she did.

Me [playing Rochel]: If you can't be my friend because of Kayla, I can understand that. She's really cool.

Rochel [playing Dina]: I'm glad you understand.

Me [playing Rochel]: Of course I do. I want you to do what makes you happy.

I may stop the role-play here and ask:

Me: Can you respect me more this way?

Rochel: Yes.

Me: How do you feel about leaving me for Kayla this time?

Rochel: Like a bit of a jerk.

Me: Do you think you might spend more time with me this way?

Rochel: Probably.

Me: So try it with Dina and see what happens. Good luck. And if she still doesn't want to spend time with you anymore, it's her loss, but you'll come out getting a lot more respect.

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,

I was recently on line in the grocery store and was horrified by the behavior of the woman in front of me. She had a full cart of groceries to unload and there were at least four people in line behind her. Did she attempt to quicken the process by being attentive and placing her groceries on the counter in a timely fashion? No, she did not. The cashier said, "Ma'am, it's your turn." Did she begin? No, she did not. Three times the cashier called her before she finally said, "Oh!" and began slowly placing items on the counter with ONE HAND. Why? Because she was noisily chatting on her phone! Esther, please address this! Unless it is an emergency, people should not be on their phones while on line in a store!

Signed,
Phone-Free Fraidy

Dear Fraidy,

You are so right! Multi-tasking is not for the grocery line (unless it includes keeping toddlers in their seat). Talking on the phone really is distracting and no one can work as efficiently when they are focusing on a phone call, just as no one can drive as well. Even if no one is behind you, though, talking on the phone is rude to the cashier. It is very dismissive to be engaged in a phone call when someone is servicing you right in front of your face. A cashier needs to be greeted and thanked. Some friendly chit-chat is nice too. We need to be aware and mindful of the people who make up our world, and certainly the ones who play even a minor role in it.

Signed,
Esther

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Dear Esther,

My parents told me that they would be paying for my family's tickets to my brother's wedding. They told us to book the tickets and they would reimburse us when they saw us next. The wedding came and went and I think it slipped my father's mind. I don't know how or if I should even ask him for the money. We bought the tickets on a credit card and don't have the money to pay the bill. If we don't get reimbursed we will have to ride the vicious wheel of those endless high-interest payments, never really making a dent in the debt. There is no way we would have flown to the wedding with all our children had we known we have to pay for it ourselves. I would have gone alone. Now what?

Signed,
Doubtful Devi

Dear Devi,

If your parents offered to pay for the tickets then I would assume it is something they genuinely want to do. You could e-mail your father something like this:

"Tatty, thank you so much for bringing the *whole* family to the wedding, something we could never do on our own! We and the children will cherish the beautiful memories forever. Enclosed are the receipts for the tickets. Thank you again. I love you."

Signed,
Esther

Are you one of those astute readers who noticed that the last issue's Esther Etiquette ends in mid-sentence? Yes, it is missing its third page! Our apologies. To read the column in its entirety, please go to nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives, and click on "Between Friends With Esther Etiquette Pesach 2015." -Ed.

