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Extended Family Relationships: Staying Friends with Former Lovers and Spouses

By Kevin B. Burk, Author of The Relationship Handbook

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B. Burk, Author of The Relationship Handbook

It's natural to want to maintain a relationship with our former romantic partners (assuming that the relationship ended on reasonably good terms, of course). We shared a special bond with them, and they touched our lives and contributed to our sense of self in ways that we cannot even begin to describe. Just because the romantic and/or sexual aspects of the relationship have ended, why shouldn't we include our former partners in our lives in other roles? If we have mutual friends, or shared custody of children, we will be spending time with our former partners whether we want to or not. Since we had a positive connection with them on so many levels, it should be easy to simply become friends, right? Not necessarily.

In many ways, we demand more of our friends than we do of our romantic partners. Once we've made a commitment to our romantic partner, we have certain obligations and duties. We're expected to support our partners in both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. Our friends have no such obligations to us. On the other hand, our friends do have to earn the right to be in our lives by supporting us voluntarily. Interested though our former partners may be in staying friends, they may not live up to our standards.

Letting go of our old habits and expectations about our former partners takes time. We need distance and perspective so that we can evaluate what kind of relationship we actually have with them.

I have a client, who we'll call Alice. Alice has been married three times. Her second husband, Jim, had two sons, whom she raised, and remained close to even after she ended the relationship with their father. Her third husband, Mike, also had a relationship with her stepsons. In many ways Mike became a surrogate father to them. Alice is still very friendly with Mike and his new wife, and socializes with them whenever they're in town.

Alice recently lost both her mother and a very close friend, both of whom Mike knew well. Alice was somewhat disgruntled that Mike did not make any offers of support to help her through her

grieving process. She was also disappointed that Mike did not make any contact with her stepsons when their biological mother passed away. Alice knew that even a phone call from him would have meant so much to them, and yet he didn't even manage that.

I helped Alice to untangle this group of extended family relationships bit by bit. The first thing we addressed was the fact that even though Mike had been a positive role model for her stepsons, he does not have an actual family connection to them. Alice was their stepmother; Mike was only their stepmother's husband. As their former stepmother, Alice's continued relationship with her stepsons is reasonable. While married to Mike, it was appropriate for her to foster a connection between him and her stepsons. However the entire basis of that connection is their shared relationship to her. Both of her stepsons are adults now, and both are married. It's a safe bet that they know how to pick up the phone and initiate contact with Mike if they want to maintain a relationship with him on their own.

Next, we looked at Alice's relationship with Mike. Had her mother and friend passed away while she was still married to Mike, she would have been entitled to expect him to provide emotional support to help her through the grieving process. However, now that she's no longer married to him (and he's married to someone else), she's not entitled to expect emotional support from him. Alice needed to adjust her checklists and her expectations in the relationship. She realized that she could no longer relate to Mike as a romantic partner, or even as someone with whom she shares a committed relationship.

Ultimately, she recognized that while she can still maintain a

cordial relationship with Mike, he doesn't meet the criteria she sets for her friends. If he were truly a friend, he would have offered some support to her when she needed it. Since she can't expect him to be there to support her, she needs to adjust her expectations of the relationship. He's not someone on whom she can count for emotional support, and that's perfectly acceptable. Their relationship has evolved. They're still peripherally involved in each other's lives; the nature of the relationship is more of a pleasant friendship (Alice described it as "neighborly"). Once she adjusted her checklists, she was able to let go of the anger she was feeling towards him.

Kevin B. Burk is the author of *The Relationship Handbook: How to Understand and Improve Every Relationship in Your Life*. Visit <http://www.everyrelationship.com> for a FREE report on creating AMAZING Relationships.

Animal lovers are never lonely

By Amelie Mag

Early childhood is an impressionable period of life in which children are often dog lovers. Parents have a great contribution in the building of their children's character by encouraging them to be animal lovers and allowing them to have a dog as a pet. Parents should encourage their young to become animal lovers because this will mean never to be alone, to always have a friend, to be comforted when sad, to be happy and needed, to learn responsibility and, last but not least, to love. That's what an animal friend teaches a child: the most valuable lesson of all.

Seeing dog lovers in parks, on television, in stores and on the streets, one can realize the benefit of having a pet as company. Having a dog or cat around the house will surely bring animal lovers a lot of smiles. Cuddling, big round eyes sending messages of love, cute fluffy ears or tail moving in signs of joy should make any heart melt. Animal lovers are the ones that feel for these helpless beings. A pet is not an object one buys to keep around the house, but a living thing that communicates and interacts with the persons around it. Animal lovers know that and they appreciate every smile a pet brings on their faces.

Dog lovers know that pets depend and need them more than a human ever will. The animals around the house have to be fed and watered and cleaned constantly, just like a child. They need their masters just like a child needs his mother to survive. Having a pet means having a lot of responsibility and dog lovers sacrifice their time, money and effort to keep their beloved company around them. Animal lovers assume the responsibility towards their pets with pleasure and never regret their efforts, because they do it out of love. In exchange, animal lovers receive even more. Animal lovers are never lonely, are always loved by their pets, they never get disappointed and often receive the comfort that a human could not give them. Not to mention animal lovers won't ever feel nagged by their pets, neglected or left aside. Having an animal for a friend is having a true friend for life.

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Another reason to why animal lovers are never lonely is the fact that their sacrifices talk a lot about the kind of persons they are: communicative, generous, not selfish, always around to help their friends in need, loving and attentive. There are many people who would want these qualities in their friends or their lovers, so animal lovers are very appreciated and loved by everyone. Single persons that are dog lovers can easily find company not only in their animal friends, but in their human friends also. Not to mention that dog lovers usually find dog lovers also as their friends, because their passion for the same pets will give them a lot of things in common to talk about. A shared passion (of any kind) will always bring two persons together. Imagine a dog lover going out to walk the dog every day. Who is he most likely going to have as a friend? Will it be his female neighbor that can't stand dog lovers? Or will it be the girl that walks her own dog in the park every morning just like him? Animal lovers, because they love life and its smallest proofs (animals) will never be alone and they will always share their pleasure with those that appreciate the same thing as them.

So if you are looking for company, animal and human, don't forget animal lovers and their pets! They will bring you the soul medicine everyone needs: love.

To meet pet lovers just like you visit the

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