My friends keep dumping their problems on me! [1]

Dear Alice,

I’m the peacemaker among my friends, the introverted listener. But lately I find myself dealing with my friends and their problems more than ever. The problems drift from abuse in their homes, relationship problems, suicide, and MORE! It seems like I’m walking around with the weight of the world on my shoulders?literally, and it’s making me dive headfirst into depression. Don’t get me wrong, I like being trusted and thought wise for advice I give, but sometimes I know I’m just being used, and all I need to do is listen. But I also feel helpless towards many of the situations, example, drug abuse or violence in their homes. They’re expecting my help most of the time! I can’t suggest counselors, because it’s un-thought of here, my friends usually have been to more than their fair share in their years, and it flat out doesn’t work. Our school counselors are bogus, teachers really don’t listen, and I’m a small girl who can’t necessarily take on the world!! On top of trying to help friends of mine (close and not-to-close) I’ve got my own problems too! It’s insane.

? The Shining Knight in Armor - NOT!

Answer

Dear Shining Knight in Armor - NOT!,

Someone once said that you cannot help others if you cannot help yourself. This down-to-earth advice may seem difficult to heed when a friend comes calling, however taking care of yourself is the surest way to be the best friend you can be. By venting, unloading, complaining, crying, and sharing feelings humans are able to process emotions and relieve ourselves from some of the weight of day-to-day problems. Clearly, you care a lot about your friends and they seem to really value your opinion, advice, and sometimes just your listening skills. However, while you?re providing your friends with a shoulder to lean on, you may also need someone to vent/cry/complain to from time to time.

You mention that sometimes you feel ?used? by your friends. Though it may be uncomfortable, saying no, especially when you feel overwhelmed, is a healthy way to set boundaries in your friendship. On occasion, turning down a front row ticket to your friend?s vent session doesn?t mean that you?re selfish or don?t care about them. It means you need some space to take care of yourself. Continuing to hear your friends out when it?s weighing you down can lead to resentment, which is no good for a healthy friendship. The simplest solution would be to gently let your friend know that it is not a good time for you to talk and
suggest another friend for them to turn to. Something like, "I really am concerned about your problem, but it’s not a good time to talk, I’m not able to focus on this conversation right now. Can you call [insert appropriate name here]?" If you find it difficult to draw the line at first, you might consider presenting an excuse, such as having homework you need to get done.

Something else to consider is the nature of your friendships, after all, a good friendship requires give and take from both people involved. Do you feel like you can confide in your friends when you have concerns or problems? Do your friends offer to talk to you if you seem to be having a hard time or a bad day? If you haven’t already, sharing your feelings might make your friend(s) feel better knowing that s/he is able to help you, too.

While you are no doubt a great listener, the problems your friends describe – drug abuse, violence, and depression – are serious enough to require the attention of a professional. Teachers and counselors are often a good starting place, but since you haven’t had much luck so far at your school you may want to speak with other adults, such as a dean, a trusted coach, or other administrators. What’s more, if you’re feeling like a damsel who needs to de-stress, you might think about making a counseling appointment for yourself. Speaking with a mental health professional may help you to strategize ways to avoid overloading your own plate with friends’ problems. Other organizations including your church, temple, mosque or local community center may have resources your friends can pursue.

Armor or not, you’re a shining example of a great friend? but for now, you might consider coming down from your stead to your own aid.

Alice!
Category:
Relationships [2]
Friendship [3]

Related questions
My friend relentlessly competes with me, and I want it to stop [4]
Don’t know if I want my friend back or not [5]
My friend constantly worries about her weight? how can I get her to stop? [6]
Social support [7]

Resources
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [8]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [9]
Published date:
Jan 25, 2008
Last reviewed on:
May 23, 2014

Footer menu

Contact Alice!
○ Content Use
○ Media Inquiries
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/my-friends-keep-dumping-their-problems-me

Links