Dear Alice,

I am a fifteen-year-old female and I have a female friend who is forty-two. I can tell this person everything ? I mean, stuff that I don't tell my mom ? so I consider this person to be my second mother. Now my question is: is it normal to have friends like that? All my friends who are my age think it is weird for me to hang out with her and my mom gets jealous because she thinks that this person is kind of taking her spot as being my mom. If you can, please give me an answer to this question. Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

It is a special thing to have connections with people you care about, trust, and can confide in. There's nothing wrong; in fact, it is completely normal to have an older friend like yours. As long as you feel comfortable, that's what matters.

There are a few possible reasons why your peers, and mother, find your relationship with your older friend questionable. In terms of the friends you have that are your age:

- Perhaps they're jealous that you have a trusted adult with whom to sort through things.
- They could wish you spent less time with her and more time with them.
- Maybe they don't understand your friendship if they've never had anything like it.
- They might view adults as "uncool," and think there's no way your friend really "gets it."

Your mother may:

- Be jealous of the time and energy you devote to your friendship. She may wish you thought of her as a friend!
- Have trouble showing you that you can trust her, too. It can be hard for parents to open up about their own experiences, show you that anything you need to talk about is okay, and stop worrying. This can be especially tough if your Mom's really busy with work, your brothers and/or sisters, or other things in her life.
- Have concerns about you being friends with someone so much older ? because of a bad experience of her own, something she knows or has heard about your friend, or simply out of the "protective mother" thing. Some people believe that adults who form bonds with children are looking to manipulate or abuse them.
Think about your reasons for being friends with this woman, and what the relationship means to you. How did you meet and how do you spend your time together? Do you always feel safe when you're together? Keep in mind that sometimes there can be an unequal power dynamic between friends from different generations, and this may be part of what your Mom or friends are worried about.

Also, when you talk about things with your friend, does it make it harder or easier to talk with your Mom later? Is it possible that you are trying to make your Mom feel bad? Do you ever spend time with your friend in order to escape something that makes you uncomfortable at home or elsewhere? such as parents fighting, annoying siblings, pressure to do something you don't want to by friends your age, or someone else? These are good questions to ask yourself no matter how old a particular friend is.

It might also help to think about the ways you can build on this friendship and continue to develop good relationships with other people in your life. For example, maybe you can invite your Mom or another friend to join you and your older friend for lunch one Saturday. Or, try talking through a dilemma with your older friend first, and then finding some ways of talking about it with your Mom, too. If your friend has children of her own that you like, spend some time with them. You could also find out if she lives or works at or near a place to meet other people your age.

In the end, it is you who knows if this friendship is valuable. If it is, it's worth defending to your Mom and other friends. One way to do this is to give them some specific examples of what you like about your friend, or what you do together. For example:

- "She's a great cook and has taught me how to make this pizza? here, have some."
- "She has every Dylan CD. I'll find out if I can lend you some of them."
- "She lets me go on about everything that's bothering me, and never interrupts. It really helps to know that she's not judging me." (Hint, hint, Mom?)

At the same time, you can let them know that you care about them and are willing to share your experiences with them, too.

Alice!

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