

FOREVER *friends?*

If you feel yourself drifting apart from old friends, then don't fret. It's perfectly normal, and could even be for the best.

Celia Jarvis explores how to let go with love...

Friends. We always assume they're going to be around forever. But not all friendships are meant to last a lifetime. Nearly everyone has experienced drifting apart from a once-loved school friend, suddenly realising that their values are worlds apart from yours.

A study, published earlier this year by Doctor Robin Dunbar of Oxford University, found that women can lose up to 40% of their friends while at university. Dunbar suggested this was partly due to life changes, and partly to feeling less connected.

But, friends coming and going isn't exclusive to university – it's a cycle that can continue throughout our lives.

"People change over time and it's very rare that two friends, even very good ones, will change in the same direction", says friendship coach and author of *Best Friends Forever*, Irene Levine.

"Most friendships are bound to a specific time, place or season, and these relationships can have expiration dates, because friendships tend to run their natural course."

Clare, an actress from South East London, knows all about this. "When I began my drama training it felt completely right for me, and I assumed my nearest and dearest would be pleased. But I remember a close friend remarking that I'd become 'really actressy and irritating.'"

"It caused a rift, because I didn't want her negativity around me. Years later, I heard that she was training to be an actress too, so perhaps she felt stunted and took it out on me. There are no hard feelings and I wish her well."

Once a friendship has lived out its destiny, letting go with love is key to helping both parties leave with their dignity and good memories intact. Most friendships will naturally drift apart, but if this isn't happening, an honest conversation is the next step. There's no one way to do this, but remaining kind yet truthful about your feelings and giving examples of the behaviour that's hurting you is the fairest way to separate. If you're not envisaging a permanent split, but need some time apart, then let them know how much – is it weeks, months or years you have in mind?

Rosie, a visual merchandiser from Suffolk, decided to move on with a one-sided friendship, "My friend was texting me all day, telling me about her many self-created problems. I didn't mind, but when I had my own concerns she wasn't there for me. I explained how I felt and she was upset, but I knew, deep down, the friendship had ended. If I felt guilty, I'd remind myself that the universe abhors a vacuum. I know she's made new friends now, and I have too."

"Letting go with love is key to helping both parties leave with their dignity and good memories intact"