

"I Don't Want to Burden My Friends with My Estrangement"

Many estranged parents worry about burning out their friends by always being sad or needing so much support. This is, in part because since most people don't go through an estrangement, they may not realize how painful it is.

But, in the context of friendship, estrangement should be treated like any other chronically painful or difficult problem such as being married to a troubled or difficult spouse, dealing with a mother or father's chronic and dwindling health, a death, or having a painful or worrisome illness.

If they're a good friend, they'll assume that you'll want to spend at least some time talking about it whenever they see you and that you'll then probably want to talk about something else.

It's true, that if we only talk about our suffering we can burn out our friends or others who care about us. That's because no one has endless empathy. People rightly want us to focus on other aspects of our lives such as what we're grateful for, what's working in our lives, and of course, what's going on in *their* lives. But, that's why I provide the examples of being married to a difficult spouse, dealing with an aging parent, a death, or your own chronic illness--because those are topics that a lot of people have to go through-- or certainly know plenty of others who do.

So, think about how much support you might ask for or offer if it was one of those problems, and use that as a reference point in getting help for your estrangement.

Like any other aspect of friendship, some of your friends will be better able to support you than others. You may have to consciously choose who you get support from and who you don't. For a variety of reasons, some people are constitutionally unable to offer the right kind of support either because they haven't had to wrestle with deeply painful, unsolvable issues in their lives, or because they feel too worried or responsible when someone talks about a painful problem and the anxiety and stress makes them want to get off of the subject.

However, if you're not getting support from *any* of your friends, it may be more a reflection of your worry about burdening them, than your having unsupportive friends.

My experience is that most estranged parents err in the direction of not talking to their friends *enough* about their estrangement. We're so worried about burdening people with our ongoing, unrelenting tragic tale that we don't say anything. We assume that our friends are sick of our problems, feel guilty that they don't know how to help us, worry that their empathy isn't enough, or are frustrated that we haven't fixed it already.

If that's true for you, pick someone in your life to whom you haven't yet confided, and try opening up to them a little more.