

first feud



Traci Coulter, 30, public relations executive

When you can't tell your best friend

Let's say your best friend looks you in the eye and says, "I'm going to ask you something about my husband, and I want your honest opinion."

Would you give it to her straight, knowing that the answer might sting? Or would you skirt the truth to spare her feelings? When

insight

Barbara is my best friend

And although we're alike in a lot of ways, when it comes to guys, we are really different. Still, she's the one I turned to when I found out something upsetting about my boyfriend, Ryan.

I expected her support

But what I got was a full-frontal attack. She came right out and told me that Ryan didn't love me—that he was using me because he didn't want to be alone. I was shocked and hurt, but I was already such an emotional wreck that I let it go.

Then he and I made up

When I told Barbara the good news, she hit the roof. She said, "I'll never speak to you again. You deserve all the pain and suffering you get for staying with him!" How horrible is that?!



Traci called me in hysterics

She went on and on about her boyfriend Ryan's latest screwup—she found out he was cheating on her. For me, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. I never felt Ryan treated Traci with the love and respect she deserves, and this latest fiasco was proof positive.



So I told her that she should leave him

I told her that the sadness would go away and in the long run she'd be happier. I suggested she try therapy, maybe even spend time by herself. I spent hours on the phone with Traci—often in the middle of the night—consoling her and trying to make her understand that she deserved better than him.



Now I'm sorry I said anything

She wants me to accept Ryan with open arms, but I can't. I feel she's caught in a destructive cycle—and I should know. I ended a long-term relationship that was similar to theirs: My boyfriend would hurt me, I'd fall apart, my friends would pick me up, then I'd take him back. Thank God, I came to my senses.

Say what?

If you're gonna ask for advice about your guy, be prepared—the answer you get may knock your socks off. Here, *First* readers share some rather, uh, open exchanges.

■ "He's not right for you!"

"I was sure my brother was going to give my new man a thumbs-up until he said, 'He's nice, but he's not right for you.' Something told me he had a point. And he did—I broke up with the guy, and I'm now happily married to the love of my life."

—Elizabeth Miller, 31

■ "You can do better!"

"My friend called me, upset, because she broke up with her boyfriend. I told her I couldn't agree more since she could do better. An hour later she took him back and didn't talk to me for months. Things turned out okay, though: We made up, and the guy's out of the picture."

—Jae-Ha Kim, 35

Photo, Traci Coulter: Jeffrey Green. Photo, Barbara Erickson: Chris Fitzgerald. Text: Lisa Arcella.

't stand d's man

put on the spot by her best friend, Traci, Barbara decided to follow her gut. Here, both women tell their side of the story.

Barbara Erickson, 30, public relations executive



I can't even talk to her anymore

Whenever I try to have a normal conversation, without even bringing Ryan up, she starts in on how I should get over him and find someone new. I find that so insulting. She knows I have no

intention of leaving him! I don't even think she's really that upset about me and Ryan. I think she's just projecting a lot of feelings about her own past relationship problems onto me.



We hardly speak now

On the few occasions when Traci and I do talk, she'll force-feed me all this ridiculous nonsense about how "great" her relationship is when I know—and she knows—it's complete bull. And I just can't take her don't-blame-him-it's-all-my-fault routine. You know, it's so difficult to watch someone you care about allow herself to be treated so badly.

■ "Move on!"

"I was dating this man, and I asked a friend what she thought of him. She surprised me when she said, 'You've outgrown him. Move on.' I thought she was just jealous. Later, though, I realized she was right and was a true friend for revealing her honest opinion."

—Jasmine Trabelsi, 25

Editor's note:

When we went to press, Ryan and Traci had broken up for good. Traci caught him in another compromising position and now is sure he has been unfaithful—just like Barbara had been saying all along.

OUR FEUDERS RESPOND



Traci: I guess I was looking more for Barbara's approval than for real advice. And I admit that I did want to "prove" Barbara wrong in her opinion of Ryan. But I don't think we need to meet with a third party. Barbara is one of my best friends, and I cannot imagine my life without her. I think we're mature enough to get through this.

Barbara: Traci knows I love her and that I want what's best for her. However, I can't support her decision to stay with Ryan. I just can't like him, and to do so would compromise my support of her well-being. But if talking to a therapist would decrease the drama, I'd be happy to do it.

A MEDIATOR WEIGHS IN

Elayne Savage, Ph.D., psychotherapist and author of *Don't Take It Personally! The Art of Dealing With Rejection and Breathing Room* (New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2001), offers this friendship-mending advice. While both women want to save their friendship, it's up to Barbara to take the first step. She should tell Traci she supports her—whether or not she leaves Ryan. Otherwise, she's placing conditions on the friendship that Traci may not accept.

Once that's behind them, the two friends should revisit what was said, what was meant and how each feels about the situation. For example, Barbara can say to Traci what she said at left ("It's so difficult to watch someone you care about allow herself to be treated so badly"). And Traci can try to recognize that, despite Barbara's I-know-I'm-right delivery, her friend is coming from a place of caring.

Sometimes friends ask for advice in a "help me, don't help me" manner—and that seems to be the case with Traci. What she really wanted from Barbara was support, not armchair therapy. If these friends still find it tough to talk, they should consider counseling. A third party can help them find a common ground and bring them back together.