

## Band-Aids and Boundaries

I've always been the "mom friend". I was the girl who helped my friends with their resumes, who always had a Band-Aid on hand, who would answer the phone, no matter the hour, to lend a listening ear. The mantle of "mom friend" is a heavy cloak to wear. The "mom friend" is expected to be hyper-responsible, empathetic, and protective. They're responsible for managing the emotions and schedules of the friend group, often at the expense of their own mental well being. However, the "mom friend" is essential to maintaining peace in the friend group, and while not always appreciated, is always liked. For a long time, this was enough for me. It felt good to be needed, to be listened to. I didn't notice how my friends started to ask me "When is the party going to start?" instead of "Do you want to host?". I began to resent my friends for just assuming I was available, for never asking how I was feeling, for putting me in uncomfortable situations. It wasn't until I met Isabel that I realized what a true friendship actually looks like. For years, I thought that friendship meant supporting your friend in any way possible, but Isabel showed me that true friendship is built on mutual care, respect, and empathy.

When I met Isabel, I immediately liked her. She was loud, opinionated, and laughed loudly and joyfully. She was the opposite of "nonchalant". We were both virtual during COVID, two of the seven students attended class over zoom while the rest of the class were in-person. We lived on the same street and both of our families were pretty locked down, so we ended up connecting. I immediately tried to slip into my old role and "mother" her, but Isabel would have none of it. I made her cookies, and two days later there was a batch of both gluten and gluten free cookies on my door step, with a bottle of wine for my parents. One day she called me and asked to hang out. We went for a walk outside, both masked, and she asked me how I was doing. I replied cheerfully that I was "fine!" and asked how she was doing. Isabel said that she was

struggling with lockdown, and was feeling just generally anxious with everything that was going on in the world. We talked about the things that everyone was talking about during quarantine: vaccinations, the Black Lives Matter protests, the president. We talked about school things, our teachers and our homework. As we walked, I found myself opening up, ranting about things that were bothering me in a way that I hadn't with my friends in years. I remember apologizing, blushing and trying to laugh off how animated I had been seconds before. Izzy looked at me strangely, and told me not to apologize for having opinions.

When we got back to school, I introduced Izzy to my old friend group. By that point, it had been two years since I had worn the mantle of the "mom friend". It didn't take long before my old routine started up again. I would be walking with Izzy but have to stop mid-conversation to answer a call from a crying friend. I started to get resentful again, burnt out from being my friends' free therapist/mediator/personal assistant. One day, I was hanging out with Izzy and someone texted on a group chat asking what time people should show up to my house for trick or treating. I literally felt sick in my stomach. It had been two years since I had hosted halloween, and I didn't feel comfortable having a bunch of people in my house when COVID was still relatively fresh in my mind. My sister has a poor immune system and it would have been really bad if she had gotten sick. Isabel looked at her own phone, read the text, and frowned. She knew about my sister, and knew that she was one of the only people who my parents trusted to be in our house without a mask. She asked me when I had planned a halloween party, half jokingly, when I was planning on inviting her. I quickly explained to her that I hadn't planned a party, that if I had she would have known right away, and that people just expected me to host because I was the designated "hostess". Isabel listened as I began to ramble about all of the things I had been holding in for so long, nodding and letting me get it all off my chest. When she was done

she asked if I wanted to host Halloween. I thought about it for a minute and realized I didn't want to. Then, Isabel, my first true friend, smiled and grabbed my phone, typing out a quick message about how I wasn't going to be hosting Halloween that year but maybe I would catch up with them later and that I hoped they had fun. She let me read it over and when I gave the okay, she sent and silenced my phone. It was then that I realized that Isabel would want to be my friend whether I had a Band-Aid in my purse or not. She liked me for me, not for what I could do for her.

From that day on, I was more protective of my time and energy around my friends. I ended up finding a new friend group, with girls who always appreciate when I do things for them, and support me in return. I learned that friendship is a two way street and that it's important to communicate with your friends so that you don't get resentful of them. Isabel is still my best friend today, and because of her, I now have many other true friends. We support each other, respect each other's boundaries, and are empathetic above all else. I'm so grateful to Izzy, for showing me what a true friendship looks like.