

## MISS MANNERS

# Confidante feeling too close for comfort

**Dear Miss Manners:** My best friend got married about a year ago, and I consider her and her husband both to be very good friends. My problem is that she calls me to vent every time she has a problem with her husband.



JUDITH  
MARTIN

I understand the need for people to vent, but all of it is stuff that her husband would be humiliated or angry to know she was telling me. She repeats their fights word for word, tells me all about her husband's depression, private stuff about her husband's family (whom she dislikes greatly), gossip about her husband's friends and co-workers, etc. She always says, "He would kill me if he knew I told you this, but..."

• **Our advice columnists:**

**Sunday, Thursday:**

Cheryl Lavin, "Tales From the Front"

**Monday, Friday:** Judith Martin, "Miss Manners"

**Tuesday, Saturday:**

Harlan Cohen, "Help Me, Harlan!"

**Wednesday:** "Elder Wisdom Circle"

I want to be there for her, but some things I am plain not interested in hearing. I was raised that private family stuff should be kept private. She wants more than just an ear — she wants me to help her analyze what they really meant. I don't know how to ask her, without hurting her feelings, to either tone down the level of info she gives me or maybe talk to someone else. I've tried, but if we're on the phone she'll talk over me

and then end the call; if we're face-to-face, she'll get incredibly off ended and try to pick a fight.

The truth is that she gets a thrill out of sharing confidential information, and has been this way for as long as I've known her. I can't just ignore her, because I babysit for her child. Any thoughts?

**Gentle Reader:** If Miss Manners were you, she would be thinking about getting a new best friend, even if it entailed finding a new babysitting job. Because your friend has always been like that, you might think about what she must be telling others about you. It is not Miss Manners' job to break up friendships, however, and you have not proposed to do so. Merely to discourage these confidences, she would advise "being there" — not for your friend, but for those who are, in fact, not there. A few rounds of "Your poor husband is depressed — you should go easy on him" and "Your mother-in-law has a point" and "They sound like people I would like" should dramatically dampen her desire for these discussions.