

Play-Dating

TAKING THE RISK
TO MAKE A NEW
FRIEND

BY LYDIA RUEGER



IT WAS YET ANOTHER PHONE NUMBER scribbled on a scrap of paper and tucked into my purse, following the words, “We’ll have to get together sometime.” Realistically, it would fall into the ghost town of old grocery lists and credit card receipts beneath my wallet, and I would never call. Anyway, I was happy with the friends I had met through MOPS and didn’t really have time to invest in anyone else.

Then my phone rang. “This is Stacy, from the park. With the two girls? We’d talked about getting the kids together for a play date?” *Sigh.*

OK, here we go. Pack a well-balanced lunch that no mom can judge. Dress my 2-year-old in something cuter than usual but casual, and the same goes for me. Make a mental list of witty, yet non-offensive topics to talk about. Pray that my kid doesn’t cause irreparable harm to hers. Ready? I hope my apprehension is hidden by my smile.

Turns out our girls got along great, but I wasn’t sure about this woman. For one, she complained a lot: *There’s not enough to do for young families. Who plans these kiddie classes at the rec center anyway? That woman was*

totally shaking her head about MY kids’ behavior ... and on and on.

Yet, her onslaught of negativity reminded me of someone. It was annoying, yet comfortable. Wait, she was acting just like *me*, inside my head. I had just met the non-filtered version of me, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to hang out with her. But after realizing how much I had in common with her, I decided maybe I could give it just one more try.

After one more play date, then another and another, the conversation became easier. I found myself becoming comfortable enough to open up and an honest friendship formed. As it turns out, much of our negative self-talk (by my amateur diagnosis derived mostly from MOPS speakers) was really just a cover for our own insecurities — about parenting the *right* way, about finding genuine friends in this new life stage, about raising daughters based on less-than-healthy relationships with our own moms.

I invited her to MOPS several times and shared what I had learned through our speakers, but she never came. I questioned if it was because I had poorly represented MOPS or Christians or Jesus, and I’m still not sure. But now, years later, she is a little more comfortable in her own skin and a little less negative, just like me. Maybe, she just needed a support group of two.

Had I stuck to my *safe* group of MOPS friends or bailed after one bad play date, I would have missed out on this loyal, creative, funny woman behind the sarcastic, non-filtered exterior. And I would have missed out on an opportunity to be honest about who I am and my own insecurities. **M**

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Acts of Kindness



BY BECKY WOOD

A FRIEND RECENTLY EMAILED me an old picture. The photograph shows her young daughter clutching my then 4-day-old son. Under the picture my friend wrote, “Remember this?”

Of course, I remembered that day. The picture was taken on my first day home from the hospital after giving birth to my fourth child. That day my husband returned to work. To top it off, snow walloped our house and school was cancelled. I was cocooned inside my home with my four young sons, ages six to newborn. I tried to keep it together, honestly I did. But to say I felt overwhelmed would be an understatement.

A wise friend sensed that I needed help. She called me and ordered my whole crew over to her house to play. I graciously declined her offer as snowdrifts engulfed our driveway making it impossible to maneuver my car from the garage. Not easily deterred, my friend offered her shuttle services too. Within minutes I watched her black minivan cut through the powdery street. Her van took on the form of a chariot with my angelic friend perched at the wheel.

Once at her house, she showered me with help and attention. I lounged on her couch tending to my newborn in peace. My other three boys descended on her basement, frolicking with her girls. It was rowdy and I’m sure her basement was littered with toys, but my friend didn’t seem to mind. She announced, “The only reason you get up is if you see blood.” So, I sat basking in the serenity of her quiet living room.

Since then, I’ve thought about my friend’s kind actions. Often-times, I feel guilty that I can’t provide more assistance to others in my life as the demands of tending to my little ones engulf my time. I’ve learned helping a friend doesn’t require a monumental act. Little actions — making a meal, helping with friend’s children, providing a listening ear — can be exactly what’s needed.

My kind friend got me through that first day home from the hospital and many days thereafter. When she asked, “Do you remember?”

I said, “How could I forget?” **M**

Becky Wood is a freelance writer who lives in Indiana with her husband, Chris, a physician, and their sons: Caleb (9), Connor (7), Cooper (5) and Collin (3). Follow her at: woodboyschronicles.blogspot.com.

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