

Busy friend is angry when left out of plans

DEAR HARRIETTE: This year has been extremely busy for me and my core friend group. No matter how much we try, it seems like every time we try to pick a time we can all be available to catch up and do something together, we fail. I recognize that being busy is not always something people can change, but still, isn't it important to make time for the ones you love? One friend in particular often puts us off for months at a time or simply doesn't respond. If we happen to make plans without her, she doesn't take it well. The other day, we were all finally out to dinner, and I casually mentioned that sometimes it takes months to plan with her, and she got really defensive and accused me of "talking crap." Did I overstep? Or is she being sensitive? — Busy Schedules

DEAR BUSY SCHEDULES: Rub-



Sense and Sensitivity

Harriette Cole

bing it in was not the nicest thing for you to do. You all know how difficult it is to get together. Instead of turning the knife as you did, consider another option for the future. Why not agree to set a date to get together every quarter. Those who can join should come; those who cannot will be missed. That way, you see one another without guiltng anyone who can't make it.

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When dog opens the door

Dear Annie: For most of my life, I've struggled with feeling isolated. As someone on the autism spectrum, I've often found social situations confusing or overwhelming. I longed for connection but wasn't always sure how to reach for it. Then something unexpected gave me not only companionship but also a sense of purpose: my dog.

She's not just a pet. She's a trained service animal who goes everywhere with me. She helps me navigate the world in ways I didn't think were possible. When I take her into stores, on walks or even to the coffee shop, people stop to smile, ask questions and sometimes share their own stories about dogs they've loved. She has opened doors to conversations and friendships I never would have had on my own.

And it's not only service dogs that can change a life. Emotional



Dear Annie

Annie Lane

support animals bring daily comfort and stability to those who need them. Therapy dogs can be taken to nursing homes, hospitals or schools, where they brighten the lives of people who might not see much joy in their days. I've seen firsthand how one wagging tail and a few minutes of gentle presence can soften the hardest expressions and bring light to the loneliest corners.

When we step outside of ourselves and look for ways to share that light — whether through a beloved pet, a service animal or volunteering alongside a therapy dog — we don't just help others. We find our own lives brighter, too. The loneliness lessens, and in its place comes

purpose, routine and a daily reminder of connection.

Sometimes the simplest answer to human loneliness is found in the company of a warm, loyal, four-legged friend. — Saved By My Service Dog

Dear Saved: Thank you for your heartfelt note. You're absolutely right; animals can be powerful companions. Whether as service animals, emotional support pets or therapy dogs, they offer companionship, comfort and even new pathways to connect with others. Your story is a beautiful reminder that sometimes the best medicine for loneliness has four paws and a wagging tail.

Dear Annie: I've always been the one in my family who organizes the holidays, remembers birthdays and keeps everyone connected. Lately, though, I feel taken for granted. My siblings rarely help, and when I try to step back, I'm made to feel

guilty for "not caring." I love my family, but I'm exhausted from carrying the load. How do I set boundaries without seeming cold or uncaring? — Worn Out Peacemaker

Dear Worn Out Peacemaker: You're not cold; you're human. Families often lean on the person who makes things happen, until that person is running on empty. Boundaries don't mean you care less; they mean you're protecting your well-being. Start small: Say, "I can host, but I'll need everyone to bring a dish," or, "This year I'm stepping back from planning." The people who value you will step up. And those who don't? Let their disappointment be theirs to manage, not yours.

Follow Annie Lane on Instagram at @dearannieofficial. Visit <http://www.creators-publishing.com> for more information. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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Choose what makes you happy and head in that direction. Not trusting in your own abilities will put you in danger of becoming a follower instead of a leader. Choose to make your dreams come true instead of working to achieve someone else's vision. Step up and do what you do best.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) — Trust your instincts, not what others try to lead you to believe. The more you believe in yourself, the easier it will be to convince others to believe in you as well.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) — Size up whatever situation you face. If it isn't necessary to form alliances, you are best to work alone. Create a space you can call your own and pursue the journey and destination you desire.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Keep your thoughts and emotions to yourself. No one will understand your reasoning or your need to head in the direction you choose. Less conflict, greater gain and satisfaction will come with independence.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 19) — Pay attention to how you feel, look and what you can do to ensure a healthy future. Refuse to let anyone lead you astray or down a path that is emotionally, financially or physically excessive.

PISCES (Feb. 20-March 20) — Check options, see what makes sense and pursue your objective. Don't buy into someone else's dream or overpay for something you want. Stay focused and reasonable, and pursue your dreams.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Emotions will be close to the surface. It's essential to stick to the facts and verify information. Be willing to help others, but refuse to let anyone take



Astrograph

Eugenia Last

advantage of you or what you can offer.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — An opportunity to partner with someone or to work from home looks promising. Trust your instincts and check out what you need to do to reach your expectations.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) — Reach out; participate in a function that addresses something that concerns you. An opportunity to discuss possibilities will be informative and profitable.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) — You've got your finger on the pulse, and you're ready to optimize your talents and excel in ways you never thought possible. Step up and make your voice heard.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Keep your eye on what's happening around you. Not everyone will be trustworthy or out to help you. Be ready and willing to take the initiative and to do the work yourself if you want to make progress.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Listen carefully, and don't hesitate to do your own thing. Working under the confines of what others want will not get you where you want to go. Size up the competition.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Focus on home and yourself, and it will help you look and feel your best. Take steps to disclose the necessary information to achieve your objectives. A move or lifestyle change will deliver the boost you need to advance.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
1 Cake of ground beef
6 Make pulpy
10 Horse's gait
14 Bombard
18 Hooded jacket
20 Succulent plant
21 — avis
22 City in the Cornhusker State
24 Hit
25 Sugar serving
26 Monumental
27 Emitting light
29 In — (altogether)
30 500 sheets
32 Water barrier
34 — monster
36 Arab ruler
37 Typesetting widths
38 Word in a forecast
39 Apportion
41 Period
43 Isle of —
44 Enthusiastic
45 Made a scornful face
47 Name in fashion
49 Seasoning plant
52 Devotees
53 Writer — Bellow
55 Directs
59 Stay away from
60 Voyage at sea
62 Crucifix
64 Pertaining to blood
65 Blowhole
66 Artistic work
67 Actor — Romano
69 Mixed-breed dog
71 Hindu goddess
72 "— longa ..."
73 Coffee beverage
74 Easter item
75 Scandinavians
77 Circular edge
78 Actress — Blunt
80 Diving mask attachment
82 Long account
84 Boa
85 Wearing footwear
- DOWN**
1 Adhesive
2 Writer — Chekhov
3 Legal wrongs
4 46-Down plus one
5 Chatter
6 Colorful bird
7 Former student, for short
8 Weep
9 Inattentive
10 Earthquakes
11 Take the — (accept blame)
12 First (Abbr.)
13 Implied but unspoken
14 North Star
15 Big bird
16 Shoestring
17 Motif
19 Central part
23 Indigo
28 Give it a go
31 Many years
33 India pale —
35 Showed the way
38 Pip
39 "— Get Your Gun"
40 Watery-eyed
42 Winged insect
44 Grow together
45 Topping
46 Pair
48 Woodwind instrument
49 — bean
50 At any time
51 Absurd
52 Worry
54 Place
56 Ireland (2 wds.)
57 Gully
58 Covered with goo
60 Metropolis
61 Cogito — sum
63 Demand payment from
66 Sicily's capital
68 Concurred
70 Set free
73 Preferred things
- 74 Stand
75 — Moines
76 "The — Sense"
79 Coaster
80 Costa del —
81 Krazy — of old comics
83 Fasten
84 Musical work
85 Long, angry speech
86 Monopoly token
89 Judgment of —
91 Work note
92 Trick
95 Curved path
97 Any dog or wolf
98 Iron corrosion
100 Burn
101 Countless
103 "— Enchanted"
105 Flash
106 Doctrine
107 Feels poorly
109 Days long past
111 Delay
113 Hammered instrument
114 Soldier's meal
116 Hopeful one, colloquially
118 Mocking irony
120 Of the universe
122 Life story, briefly
124 "Go team!"
125 Shoe part
126 ABA member
127 Poet — Teasdale
128 Budgetary concern
130 — — disturb
132 Singer — Midler
133 Man from Havana
134 In the air
135 Levies
137 Finished
139 Toy with a tail
141 Spinnaker
142 Roll call response
144 R.E.M.'s first record label
146 Crusty treat —
148 Old name for Tokyo
150 Bouncer

DO JUST ONE THING

Being eco-conscious on your wedding day can make a meaningful difference. Instead of managing every green detail yourself, choose a venue that already practices sustainability. Look for one that maximizes natural light and partners with vendors who use locally grown flowers for decor. Ensure the

venue handles recycling and composting, and that it donates leftover flowers and food to local charities. And when it comes to catering, opt for a team that sources seasonal, locally grown ingredients and embraces a farm-to-table approach.

— Danny Seo

