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Why Moms Are Compelled to Bail on Mom's Night Out

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How often do you get a chance to go out and have fun with your friends to the point that you may even forget you are a mom for a few moments? Parenting magazines constantly tell us that we need to have girlfriends and give ourselves a break, but is this really a reality for most of us?

Last year I launched my Stories, Smiles, and Salads book club to try and get a group of women together consistently to read books that would make us laugh, while also eating some healthy salads and sipping on tasty wine. The key word here is consistent. Totally laughable, right? Like many of my attempted social endeavors since motherhood, it never quite works out how I imagined. Inevitably, the women drop out like flies during the day of the book club for a number of reasons (totally legitimate, mind you).

“I’m too tired.”

“My husband has a late work meeting.”

“My babysitter just cancelled.”

“Things are crazy in my house and I can’t leave the kids.”

“My kid just got sick.”

“I just found out I have to be at my child’s sports game that I totally forgot about.”

"My month was so busy, and I didn't read the book, so what's the point in going?"

Last month three women out of 10 showed up at my house, which was not a complete bust, but it was pretty frustrating to witness the text messages popping up on my phone one after another as seven pm approached. Each time this happens I try so hard not to get disappointed, but the truth is, it still upsets me. I really want to get to know other moms and be social, but it's just not the same as it was in college when women had all the time and freedom in the world to sit around for hours chatting and bonding.

Why is it like pulling teeth to get moms to go out and enjoy a night together without our spouses or kids? Why does it seem impossible to truly get to know other moms? Here are some of the reasons I have uncovered over the years after seeing similar patterns of women backing out last minute.

Trust and control issues

Some moms just can't pass the baton to someone else and take time off. They're unable to trust a babysitter or their husband to watch the kids for the night while they go out. Maybe some of them also suffer from FOMO (fear of missing out) when it comes to their kids. These women are probably the ones who declined my invitation to join the book club from the get-go. They feel tied to their home and family, and need to control the dinner and bedtime routine every single night – to a fault.

Commitment overload

Many moms just can't handle multiple commitments in a given day or week. So often I hear from other women that they can't attend because they have just one other event scheduled that week. Even if they have several weeks of notice, they just can't balance it all. They feel overwhelmed and, even though getting together with their girlfriends would be a relaxing break, the whole concept of another commitment just stresses them out. One mom told me that the sheer thought of reading a book with a deadline gave her so much anxiety that she just couldn't participate in the book club at all. It's not like we're being tested on the book!

Bad luck?

Then there are a couple of women who, month after month, have some crazy situation appear out of nowhere, and you have to wonder after a while if they are just looking for an excuse to not show up. I totally understand the many moving parts of a family, but it just seems unlikely that the same person would always have a wild last-minute issue ruin the day like a kid throwing up, an excruciating migraine, the car breaking down, or a husband who all of a sudden went out of town. These are definitely the women who are extremely difficult to get to know because they are always backing out at the last minute. Is something else going on with them that they aren't sharing?

Something better comes up

This is the worst. Sometimes a mom will change her reply last minute because something "better" came up. Maybe it was a work happy hour or a friend's birthday dinner or a relative is coming to town and so they nix the book club. Again, understandable to a point, but years ago people lived by the etiquette rule that the first invitation we accept is the one we should keep. It's hard to build a friendship with someone who prioritizes others, especially at the last minute.

Then there's the whole issue of what we end up talking about – usually nothing to do with the book, mind you. I really feel like women are afraid to get too close to other moms from their child's school. Nobody is willing to really show their true colors and tell us what's going on in their lives. We all put up a big wall around us, and then talk about safe topics like homework, teachers, upcoming school events, what extracurricular activities our children are participating in, and maybe some school gossip. Occasionally, we'll get some nuggets about how they met their husbands or how they struggled to get pregnant, but for the most part I feel like it has been impossible for moms to be honest and authentic.

Why is this? Again, I think I've identified a few themes that explain this bizarre mom social behavior.

Some moms just can't turn it off

Once a mom, always a mom. Some women just can't leave the mom "uniform" behind and enjoy themselves like they did when they were younger. They're so focused on (or maybe obsessed with) their own children that they're no longer capable of holding a conversation about anything outside the realm of motherhood. Frankly, I can handle talking about kid stuff for a bit, but I really want to dive into what the book was about or something more interesting going on in the world or their lives.

Competitive nature

Then there are those moms who are so cautious about what they say because they want their kids to be the best at everything and to uphold a particular reputation at school. Even if their child is struggling, they would never admit to it because then all the other moms would realize that their kid isn't that great. Again, how can we ever really get to know someone if they are so competitive that they never tell us what's really going on with their family?

Their gossip guard is up

I also imagine that, by this stage in our lives, we are afraid to say too much about our personal lives because we've gotten burned so many times in the past. If a mom admits that her marriage is suffering, she is struggling with anxiety or depression, or her kid is hitting or biting, then she could become the center of gossip throughout the school community. In college and in our twenties, it seemed more likely that we would share our hook-up stories and other personal dramas that helped us bond with other women. There appears to be more risk to opening up and sharing at this point in our lives.

Don't want to put a damper on things

Finally, maybe some women just don't want to be "Debbie Downer" at a girls' night out. I totally get this, but would argue that if we're unable to let our guard down and share the raw emotions we feel and the real-life struggles that we face – a health scare or diagnosis, financial problems, or marital strife – how can we ever build strong, meaningful relationships with other women during this stage in our life?

I expect that each of us has a unique view on mom-friends. Maybe your book club is filled with extreme bonding moments or maybe you have several friends who let you cry on their shoulder. It's possible that I've just not found my tribe yet. Or maybe this is just not the time in our lives when we have the energy and emotional capacity to bond with other women because we are so focused on our spouse and children.



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