SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

“You've Changed.” So Have Your Friendships: Why Relationships Shift in Perimenopause

with Tracey Willingham · Day 2 · Tuesday, October 27 · The Unnamed Losses

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"You've changed." "You're so sensitive lately." "What's gotten into you?" And my personal favorite: "Why are you being such a bitch?"

Maybe you've heard one of those from a friend you've had forever, or maybe even from your family. Or maybe you haven't heard anything at all. Maybe your friends just aren't connecting anymore. Maybe the group chat moved on without you, and you're scrolling through 47 messages you weren't really even a part of. Maybe they had dinner and you found out from the photos.

Or maybe you're the one doing the pulling away. You let the call go to voicemail. You cancel plans and feel relieved. You love them, and you still can't make yourself show up the way you used to. Or maybe your friend is the one going through it, and you don't even know how to reach her.

However it's showing up for you, loud or quiet, if your friendships feel different and you can't quite name why, this session is for you.

Hi, I'm Tracey Willingham, That Hormone Girl. I'm a licensed social worker doing hormone work, and I'm also your host for The Missing Pieces of Perimenopause Summit.

Today is Unnamed Losses day, and I picked this topic because I feel like we don't talk about it enough. Of all the losses that show up in perimenopause, this is the one we whisper about, right? We talk about hot flashes. We talk about not being able to sleep. We even talk about intimacy. But losing a friend, feeling like your people don't recognize you anymore? That's one we carry quietly, and usually with a side of shame.

So here's what we're going to look at together today. First, what's actually changing in you, in your body and your bandwidth, and why your friends are noticing. Second, a harder question: was this friendship always this way, and you just had the energy to cover it? Third, boundaries, and what to say when setting one suddenly makes you the bad guy. Fourth, we're making room for the grief. And fifth, we're sorting it out. Which friendships do we repair? Which do we renegotiate? Which do we release? And where do we make room for new ones?

One thing before we start. I'm not here to tell you to cut everyone off. This is not a "protect your peace and block them all" session. The goal is for you to understand what's changing, know what you need now, and decide on purpose. Because hearing "you've changed" doesn't automatically mean you've done anything wrong. And changing doesn't mean you have to lose everyone you love.

All right, let's get into it.

So why does everyone think I've changed? Let's start with the honest answer: you probably have changed. And that's allowed.

In perimenopause, your hormones stop running on the schedule you had for decades. Estrogen starts swinging high and low instead of rising and falling in a predictable rhythm. Progesterone, the one that helps you feel calm and sleep through the night, tends to drop. And those hormones don't just live in your uterus. They talk to your brain. They live in your gut. They move through your whole body.

Estrogen plays a role in serotonin and dopamine, the chemistry behind your mood, your motivation, and how much patience you actually have for nonsense. And progesterone helps your nervous system settle down. So when those start bouncing around, a few things tend to happen. Your fuse gets shorter. Your sleep gets worse, and everything feels harder on four hours of sleep. The noise, the chaos, even big groups can feel like too much. And the stuff you used to be able to smile and swallow down starts coming back up.

Now layer on what else is usually happening in this season of life. Maybe you've got teenagers, or little ones, or both. Maybe you're taking care of a parent. Maybe work got heavier right when your brain fog showed up. Your plate did not get smaller. What got smaller is your capacity.

When your capacity shrinks, you can't keep doing everything you used to do. And a lot of what you used to do was invisible work inside your friendships. You were the planner. The one who remembered the birthdays. The one who checked in, smoothed things over, listened for an hour, and never asked for those hours back. When you stop doing that work, people notice, and they don't always know what they're noticing, right? They just feel the gap. And "you've changed" is often how the gap comes out of their mouth.

So yes, the hormones are real. And I want to be very clear about something, because this really does matter. Perimenopause doesn't automatically create friendship problems. What it does is turn up the volume on the issues that were already there. It makes the one-sided stuff harder to ignore and harder to keep covering.

Which brings us to the harder question: was the friendship always this way?

Sometimes when a friendship falls apart in perimenopause, you realize it was being held together by you. So ask yourself a few questions about the friendship that's been bugging you. If I stopped reaching out, how long would it take them to notice? When I'm the one struggling, do they show up, or does the conversation always circle back to them? And do I leave our time together feeling filled up, replenished, happy, or feeling like I just worked a shift?

A lot of us were raised to be the good girl in our friendships, right? Be easy, agreeable, low maintenance. We learned that being liked meant being useful, so we kept everyone comfortable

and called it loyalty. And for years, we had the energy to run that program in the background. Then perimenopause shows up and unplugs the whole program. Suddenly you can see the whole setup, and you can't unsee it.

That doesn't make your friend a villain. Most one-sided friendships aren't built on purpose. They're built one small yes at a time, and both of you probably got used to it. But it does mean that when you stop over-giving, the friendship might feel like it's wobbling. And that wobble is worth paying attention to. It's showing you what was actually holding the friendship together.

It's not unusual in perimenopause to start looking at boundaries that need to be renegotiated, or that maybe you never set in the first place. And when you start bringing boundaries into your normal daily life, that's when people start to notice. That's when boundaries can make you look like the bad guy.

So here's the plot twist. The first boundary you set in a friendship often feels like a betrayal, to them and to you. You might say, "I can't do the two-hour phone calls anymore," but what they hear is, "I don't love you anymore." So they push back, and then the comments start.

When someone says "you've changed," your body wants to do one of two things: apologize and take it all back, or blow the whole friendship up. I want to give you a third option. Can you agree with the true part and still hold the line?

Here are a few you could try. When they say "you've changed," you can say: "A lot is changing for me right now, and I'm figuring out what I can actually carry. It's about my capacity, but I still want you in my life."

When they say "you're so sensitive lately": "I am more sensitive right now. My body is going through a lot. What would help me is if we could talk about it."

And when they say "why are you being such a bitch?": "I'm not willing to be talked to like that. I want to hear what's bothering you. Can we try this again?" It might be said in jest, but at this stage in our lives, at this age, let's stop doing the "you're being a bitch" thing and really get down to what's bothering you, and talk about it.

Notice what those have in common. None of them over-explain. None of them apologize. You don't owe anyone a 20-minute explanation to earn the right to put a boundary in place. And then pay attention to what happens next. A friend who's worth keeping might be hurt or even confused at first, but she'll get curious. She'll ask, "What's going on with you?" A friend who needed you to stay small will double down. That difference tells you a lot about which pile she belongs in, and we'll get to those piles in just a few minutes.

One more thing. If you feel like you're walking on eggshells with someone, if setting a boundary with them feels unsafe, or the reaction is truly cruel, that's beyond a friendship script. That's the

moment you may need to talk with a counselor or someone you trust before you have that conversation.

Something we don't talk about a lot is grieving the friendship, and the version of you who kept it going. It's a big part of what I care about talking about today, so I'm going to slow down just a little bit.

Friendship loss is real, love. When a marriage ends, people bring casseroles. When a friendship ends, people say, "Well, people grow apart." There's not really a card for it. Nobody has a friendship ritual. You just quietly stop getting the texts, and you're supposed to act like it didn't gut you.

Friendship grief comes in a few different flavors. Sometimes the friendship ends, and you grieve them. Sometimes the friendship stays, but it shrinks or changes, and you grieve what it used to be. And sometimes you realize the friendship was never what you thought it was. That one stings in a whole different way, because you're grieving something that maybe never even existed.

But here's the loss I think sits underneath all of it. Sometimes you're grieving a friendship that ended, and sometimes you're grieving the version of yourself who worked so hard to keep it going. The version of you who said yes when you meant no. Who drove across town with a migraine because a friend needed you. Who maybe even laughed at jokes that actually hurt your feelings. You were doing your best with what you knew, and you kept a lot of people company. But now you're tired.

You're allowed to miss that version of you. You're allowed to be proud of who you were and also be done being that person. Both of those can be true at the same time.

So if you've been feeling heavy about a friendship and couldn't name why, I want you to try this. Say it out loud, or write it down if saying it out loud feels silly: "I miss who we were. I miss who I was when I was with them. And I'm not going back." Then let yourself feel whatever comes up. That's grief doing its job. We have to grieve to be able to move on, in whatever way you decide is your next step.

And that's what we're going to talk about next. What is my next step? How do I sort this, and how do I find the people I need for this next phase of my journey?

Okay. You understand what's changing. You've looked at the facts, and you've let yourself feel it. So what now? Now you sort. Think of the friendships on your mind right now, and put each one in one of four piles.

First, there's repair. This is the friendship that's actually worth a real conversation. You've drifted, or there was a hurt, but the love is there, and they've shown they can grow with you. Your move is to reach out and have the honest conversation.

Then there's renegotiate. The friendship stays, but maybe the terms change. Maybe you see them once a month instead of every week. Maybe you stop being the only one who initiates plans. Your move is to name the new terms out loud, instead of quietly resenting the old ones that are still in place.

There's release. This friendship has run its course. Maybe it was one-sided. Maybe it was unkind. Maybe it was meant for a season. Maybe you just want different things now. Releasing it doesn't require a dramatic conversation or a dramatic text. Sometimes it can be as simple as letting it soften and fade, with gratitude for the chapter it was. That's different from ghosting. Ghosting is when somebody is still trying to reach you and you go radio silent. But if you both soften and fade and move on, that's okay.

And the last one is make room. This one isn't about an old friendship. It's about the space you're freeing up. Midlife is when a lot of us start craving deeper friendships, the ones where you can say "I'm not okay" and someone actually leans in. People who get it. People who are in the thick of it too. Those friendships can hold a kind of intimacy and support that's every bit as important as our romantic relationships. There's even research coming out saying friendships in midlife are more impactful than they were during puberty. Just let that sink in. Think about how hard we tried, as teenagers, to be ourselves and find our friends, and it means even more now, in midlife.

So how do you know which pile a friendship goes in? Ask yourself three quick questions. When I picture telling them the truth about how I'm doing, do I feel relief or dread? Have they ever made room for my needs, even once, when it cost them something? And if this friendship stayed exactly the way it is for the next five years, would I be okay with that? Your gut usually answers before your brain does, so trust what your gut is telling you.

Here's what the first move can sound like, because knowing the pile is one thing, and opening your mouth and saying it is totally different.

For repair, it can sound like: "I miss you. Things have felt off between us, and I don't want to keep pretending they haven't."

For renegotiate: "I love you, and I just can't do weekly dinners right now. Can we do a walk once a month instead? I'd rather show up for real."

For release, you may not say anything at all. You might just stop being the one who reaches out every single time and let the friendship find its own level. And if it does need words: "I'm grateful for what we had. I think we've grown in different directions, and I'm okay with that."

And for make room, this is where you get to be a little brave. Say yes to the coffee invite from the person at work who always makes you laugh. Join the walking group, the book club, the pottery class, the online community full of people going through exactly what you are. And yes, making

friends as a grown adult feels awkward as hell sometimes. Do it anyway, because the people you need for this next chapter are looking for you too.

So here's my one ask. Don't try to sort out your whole life tonight. Pick one friendship, decide which pile it goes in, and choose one small move you're going to make this week.

If you want help doing that, I made you a free mini course called The Friendship Sort. It walks you through all four piles, gives you the words for the comments that knock you off center, and helps you choose that one small move. There's also another resource in the All Treats, No Tricks Pass with way more structure and in-depth steps, if you're really ready to make some moves in your friendships.

So let's review. You probably have changed. Your hormones are shifting. Your capacity is changing. And the invisible work you used to do in your friendships is getting harder to keep doing. That's real, and it's allowed. Some friendships will grow with you. Some will need new terms. And some are going to end, and you get to grieve them, and the version of you who was in them. There's room in this new chapter for friendships that actually fit who you are today.

Here's the question I want you to sit with today: Which friendship am I still carrying that I haven't let myself set down? And what would happen if I did?

If you want, take that one into the Facebook group. Work it out with company around you, and see if other women can relate. I'll be in there today too, and I'd love to hear which pile you're sorting through.

And if you want to keep going deeper with every session this week, remember the All Treats, No Tricks Pass. You'll keep all the presentations, get every speaker's bonus, and get The Haunting Questions workbook, with extra prompts for every day, including this one. And don't forget The Friendship Sort, free right below this video.

You didn't break anything by changing, friend. You didn't end a friendship because you changed. You just outgrew the version of you that everyone found convenient.

And as I always say, stay loud, raise hell, and stop feeling like shit. I'll see you in the summit.