

T H E P R O B L E M W I T H

Friends

Hey. My name's Joel. I'd say I'm a pretty good friend—but not with just anybody. In fact, I have very few friends...*(on second thought, defensively)* but it's not because I'm a jerk.

I'm just picky.

Now take Bill. I've known Bill since we were in third grade. We used to do everything together. Once we had a bottle-rocket fight in my garage, and my parents never found out. Well, one time Bill was supposed to meet me at the mall, and we were supposed to hang out for the day and then his mom was supposed to give us a ride home. Well, Bill never shows, and I get stuck at the mall and my parents are all mad because they have to come pick me up. Bill said he forgot, but I said, "Forgot? Friends don't treat each other like that. You're a jerk, Bill."

I never spoke to him again.

Then there was Eric. We were pretty good friends, and we hung around with the same crowd at school. One day Eric told me his dad lost his job and they were on food stamps now. It was okay for a while, but pretty soon Eric couldn't afford to go to the movies with us, and his clothes started to look pretty dorky. His family moved out of their house—probably because they couldn't make payments on it anymore. I think they moved into low-income housing. I don't really talk to him anymore, but I see him in the hall once in a while at school.

Now Terri and I were good friends...for a while. The problem was, she started calling me every day. I just didn't have that kind of time to spend on the phone. She got mad because I didn't call her back for four days in a row. We don't hang out together anymore.

And Karen was pretty cool—until she started having all these problems at home. Then she started to ask if she could talk to me. What she really wanted was to dump all her problems on me. I thought, "No way!" but what I told her was, *(with a facade of kindness)* "Why don't you get back to me after you get your life together?" I mean, the last thing I need is someone who's just gonna bring me down.

Anyway...like I said, I'm pretty picky about my friends...*(an awkward pause)* Actually, I guess I don't have friends...*(stubbornly confident again)* I figure that friendship is a big gift I don't want to give to just anyone who comes along. I mean, you know how it is?

END