

WELLBEING • MINDFULNESS • CREATIVITY • ESCAPE

# Breathe

*and make time for yourself*



Reflections in nature *Poetry, please* Hidden depths *Freedom of the trail* Out of this world  
*The power of resentment* Value judgments *Shine bright* Knowing me, knowing you *Storyville*





## Money talks

*In an ideal world, friendships would be strong enough to overcome differences in income, but a significant wealth difference can prove divisive. Here's how to bridge the gap*

For all the enjoyment that comes with socialising, the prospect of making plans with a wealthier friend can be a source of anxiety. How much will dinner at the expensive restaurant they've booked set you back? What if the holiday cottage they've suggested is unaffordable? Left unaddressed, the problem can escalate, especially if you feel obliged either to spend money you don't have or turn down invitations from friends in case they cost too much. But why is this such a delicate issue? And how can it be raised without causing awkwardness or embarrassment on both sides?

### Wealth or worth?

What people earn and how they choose to spend their money is a sensitive subject. Societal pressures to earn a so-called good income can make you feel insecure if you think you haven't done as well for yourself as others in your friendship circle. Believing that your value is linked to your financial status can cause feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. And being unable to match the lifestyle of a wealthier companion often leads to envy and resentment, all of which can create an unhealthy relationship dynamic.

London-based Puja McClymont is a certified life coach and spiritual teacher with a background in psychology. 'A wealth gap between friends can have an impact on self-esteem, and it may help to know that spending habits are not a reflection of worth,' she says. 'It's highly unlikely that the friendship was conceived based on wealth, therefore it's important to remember that it's much stronger than anyone's spending habits.'

Most true friends will try hard not to let each other's financial status get in the way, but it can be a challenge. This might be particularly difficult when friends who were once economic equals, perhaps both surviving on beans on toast during their college days, are now miles apart in earnings.

### Other riches

One way to prevent a have-and-have-not dynamic from forming is to keep in mind that there are many kinds of wealth, not just monetary. For example, someone who has less cash might have chosen to work fewer hours to have more free time or the flexibility to be with their family. Or perhaps they've followed a career that doesn't pay well but is rewarding in other ways, or tried hard to earn a decent income but it just hasn't worked out. No matter what the cause of a person's financial circumstances, remembering that earnings don't equate to worth helps lift any (unnecessary) shame or mutual uneasiness that can otherwise surface. And learning to be at peace with each other's financial situation is beneficial. 'Consciously accept that everyone earns and spends differently and it's not a reflection on your worth or your ability to be a good friend,' says Puja. 'Realise that everyone has different values and therefore prioritises spending differently.'

### Two sides of the same coin

While the practical considerations of trying to stay within a budget are obviously only an issue for the friend with less disposable cash, the wealthier person in the partnership may





have different concerns. They might, for example, feel guilty about their financial success and downplay it in a less affluent friend's company. They might also be constantly conscious of finances, wondering if they should be volunteering to pay for things or offering more towards costs. On occasion, they may even feel obliged to foot the total bill. If this leads to an expectation that they'll always pay for everyone, it might prompt them to question the true value of the friendship and whether some are just taking advantage of their wealth.

There's another aspect, too. Many people have demanding jobs and work 24/7, some are also paid well for their commitment. For those who fall into the latter camp, it's understandable that they might want to spend their hard-earned cash on life's luxuries, in which case, forever forgoing expensive treats to accommodate a friend's lower budget might lead to resentment.

#### Money talks

Either way you look at it, financial disparity between friends can be tricky, but there are ways to navigate the situation. First step? Get talking. While many find it awkward to discuss money with friends, saying nothing creates conflict and weakens the relationship. Honest and open communication is the first step to bridging the wealth gap. Puja says: 'Being clear and communicating boundaries, whether directly or through an individual's own actions, can make a huge

difference in making social situations more comfortable, even increasing self-esteem.'

This doesn't mean divulging the minutiae of your financial situation, rather it's about being upfront and choosing the right words for your situation (see opposite). This can relieve tension and might even feel liberating. What's more, if a money issue arises in a circle of friends, discussing it openly might reveal that others also have their own concerns.

Maggie Germano is a financial education instructor and founder of the blog Money Circle. She writes: 'There are always a lot of negative thoughts and language that come up related to money. A budget feels limiting and restrictive. Watching our spending feels like punishment. But it really doesn't have to be that way. The more we shift our language to be more positive, the better we will feel about managing money more closely, and the easier it will be to talk about money.'

Friendships don't have to suffer or drift apart because of the wealth gap. By being sensitive and considerate, focusing on shared interests and emotional connections, rather than material ones, friends can work together to minimise financial differences and strengthen the bond they share.

Words: Carol Anne Strange

To hear more of Puja's thoughts, visit [pujamcclymont.com](http://pujamcclymont.com)