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## **JOYFUL MUSINGS**

**By Joy Birnbach Dunstan, MA, LPC, MAC**

### **Dangerous Liaisons**

Do you know anyone who leaves you feeling like you've just braved a tornado after spending time with them? Or maybe you realize you're dreading today's lunch date with a friend even though the last time you went you swore you'd never do it again. Let's face it: some people are just not comfortable to be around even though they may have lots of other redeeming qualities.

You know who I mean. That friend who is always the first to offer help when you're in a bind, but then argues with you over everything you're trying to do because s/he always knows better. Or that other friend with whom you need to walk on eggshells because s/he is so easily offended by unintended slights. And, of course, that person who is so critical, you feel about two feet tall after spending time together.

Depending on the situation, you may choose to eliminate these people from your life or at least minimize the time you spend with them. Very often, especially in our small community, we can't avoid these people because they're friends of our other friends or involved with the same organization you are. Instead of trying to avoid their potential stings, how about learning not to get stung.

First, and most importantly, be true to yourself. Be mindful of your own beliefs as you hear others express theirs. Don't forget that it is your choice to adopt their ideas, use them for information, or totally disregard them if they don't ring true. If someone tosses out a criticism that isn't true, don't let it instill or reinforce your negative beliefs. What is important is what *you* believe about yourself, not what someone else says.

As much as it may seem that way, people who are chronically negative are really not committed to destroying your good feelings about yourself. People who are unhappy in their own lives frequently try to take others down with them. Unconsciously, they use putting down others as their way to be okay and feel better about themselves.

Use the qualities you notice and dislike about others as an opportunity to grow. What we see in others is a reflection of some part of ourselves. Instead of judging them, examine how you are sometimes like this. This creates compassion for the other person as well as a chance for you to work on this aspect of yourself.

Don't take the bait when someone initiates a negative message or difficult attitude. Often, they're only trying to trigger a response from you, and by reacting, you are actually giving them what they want.

Some people always want to be right. There's not much point in arguing with a person who's not going to change his or her mind. Ask yourself: Is it more important to be right or to be happy? Politely acknowledge them by saying, "Yes, I can see how you might feel that way," and let it go. Trying to talk them into your way of thinking doesn't make you any more right. Remember: what you resist, persists.

When faced with negative energy, just step aside and let it flow past you. It is only yourself who is responsible for your own happiness. Other people don't need to change in order for you to be okay. Happiness and serenity is a choice, and we can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.

[Click here to return to website](#)