Do these pants make me look ...

Written by Sara Berelsman
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I tend to say what I think. Okay, at times it's almost as if it's beyond my control and I just can't help it. Life is too short to be inauthentic and I prefer friends who tell the truth. But is honesty always the best policy?

I think most of us would agree that we don't want to surround ourselves with people who will talk about us behind our backs – unless, of course, they're praising us. What if everyone simply told others to their faces what they were really feeling instead of "faking it" or avoiding an issue altogether? Would it make life better? It would certainly eliminate the secondhand news we hear from the go-betweens who reveal to us that someone else has, in fact, been bad-mouthing us. We would already know, because he or she would have told us the problem in the first place. That would be ideal, right? Right?

We've all been let down, hurt or disillusioned by someone who we thought was our friend — someone who wasn't honest with us. It's a major blow to the self-esteem and can lead to bankrupting our trust account in general. But would it really come as less of a blow if a trusted friend were straightforward in his or her criticism? I greatly appreciate my friends who I feel have always been honest with me over those who I could sense that on more than one occasion, I had done something to upset them but instead of confronting me about it, it seemed that they were spilling their guts to other people and just ignoring me in the meantime. Why are we so afraid of confrontation? If the blunt honesty irreparably fractures the friendship, then did we really need that person around anyway?

I do think that some white lies are necessary, if only for the sake of preserving relationships with anyone at all. If we answered honestly anytime someone asked us anything, we'd be spending every waking minute informing others that, "Yes, actually, those pants really do make you look fat – really fat," or, "Do I like your cologne? If my saying that it could gag a maggot means 'liking it,' then yes, I love it."
I don't think any of us wants to be known as the abrasive, cold-hearted shell of a human who everyone eventually avoids so that we end up in complete isolation. And I think that would happen if we started speaking the truth about everything.

So when is the truth important? I think when it comes to "bigger" issues, issues that would affect

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one's life for the better or worse. If one of my friends did leave the house in pants that prompted strangers to mutter under their breath, "Free Willy!" then her life isn't necessarily over. If that same friend asked me if I thought she should leave her abusive husband, well, I might not sugarcoat that answer. Even if it means I lose a friend in the process. After all, she asked me.

Ideally, I feel that it would be wonderful if we could all walk around all day speaking the truth and nothing but the truth, but that would mean we'd also have to lose our sensitivity and I don't think I want that to happen. If I'm feeling that I'm looking my worst, it's still nicer to hear reassuring words and compliments over negative proclamations. Even if we do question the genuineness of the answer.

On that note, I've been eating a lot of Easter candy lately so I'm off to slip into my "fat jeans." Feel free to lie to me about how I look.

Sara Berelsman teaches college courses and lives in Delphos with her husband and their two daughters. She is always honest. Okay, usually.