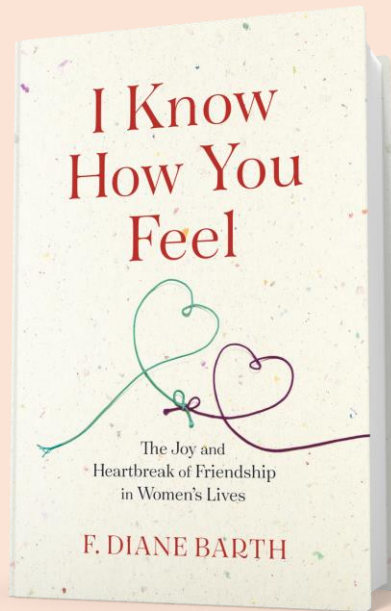


Discussion Questions for *I Know How You Feel: The Joy and Heartbreak of Friendship in Women's Lives* by F. Diane Barth



1. *I Know How You Feel* begins with the idea that women's friendships develop and change over time. Do you have lifelong friends or know women who do? Have those friendships changed over time, and if so, how?
2. What about friendships made "in context" – at work, around children, or in an activity group. Do you look for different things in a friend now than you did when you were younger? Can you discuss some of the differences in what you are looking for now and what you looked for when you were younger? What do you think about these differences?
3. An entire chapter is devoted to the question of how to define "friendship." Discuss some of the key words used in talking about friendship in this chapter. What other words might you use?
4. What did you think about the discussion of friendships with family members? Do you know some women who are too close to their families? What are the problems that occur when someone is best friends with their spouse, mother, or child? What are some of the benefits? Have you known someone who has suffered as a result of such a bond? What about you? Do you think of your family as friends?
5. Daphne comes home to find her husband and her best friend in bed together. This is a pretty dramatic betrayal by the two people she trusted the most in her life, of course, but betrayals come in all sizes and shapes. What do you think about how Daphne handled the experience? Did you empathize with her pain, or did you have other thoughts and feelings about what had happened? Have you ever been betrayed by a friend, or do you know of a situation like Daphne's?
6. Some women also talk about their feelings of shame, sadness, and guilt when they were the one who did the hurting. Facebook and other social media have made it easier to find some of those old friends and make apologies for having hurt them. Is there a way that Daphne's friend Jennifer could repair the relationship, if she wanted to? And if she tried, how do you think Daphne should respond?
7. What do you think about the relationship between Alysha and her best friend Sherry, who disappeared while Alysha was ill? Is it really okay for a friend to abandon a friend in need, no matter what the reason? What do you think about Sherry's explanation of why she had to pull away? And what about the new friendship between Alysha and Debra? What did you think about how that friendship changed after the illness?
8. A number of books in recent years have explored some of the hidden and more difficult aspects of women's friendships. For instance, have you read Elena Ferrante's by now legendary portrait of a friendship between women over time? Did it resonate with some of your own experiences of

friendship? Are there other portraits of women's friendships in literature that have stuck with you?

9. What do you think about the issue of competition between women friends? Do you agree that this is a normal and healthy part of friendship that needs to be accepted and integrated more openly into women's relationships? Or do you think that women need to be supportive of one another and to find ways to diminish competitive feelings between friends?
10. Illness, death, moves, and life changes like divorce and job opportunities can lead to loss in friendship. What do you think about the death of a friend leaving a "hole in your heart"? How do you explain this kind of loss?
11. What did you think about the sections on "What You Can Do"? What, if any, solutions did you find particularly useful? What did you not find useful at all? What did you think about the idea that there were several possible answers, and that no single approach or solution was offered?
12. The book deals with several controversial issues, including sexual tension between women. How did you feel about those discussions? What do you think about the idea that women feel sexual attraction to other women as part of their ongoing experience?
13. Do you think that men and women can be friends with one another? What are some of the complications that can occur in such a relationship? What did you think about the discussion of that difficulty?
14. Although there is not a specific chapter on this issue, many readers have said that after reading *I Know How You Feel* they were no longer convinced that men's friendships were so very different from women's. What do you think: do men and women have different kinds of friendships? If so, how would you describe those differences? If not, what do you think keeps the myth of difference so powerful?
15. Has the book given you a different perspective on women's friendships? Can you discuss?