



THE FLAKE FACTOR

There are times when it's acceptable to bail... others, not so much. Let our Flake-o-meter guide you

WEDDING**BEST FRIEND**

Full Flake
You're terrible, Muriel.

DISTANT COUSIN

Half Flake
It depends on the catering...

EX-BOYFRIEND

Empty packet
No one will judge you on this.

BABY SHOWER**GODCHILD**

Full Flake
A no-show does not spell spiritual guidance.

SIBLING

Three-quarter Flake
Flunked: Favourite Aunt 101.

FRENEMY

Quarter Flake
Payback for what she pulled on your 30th birthday.

FUNERAL**GRANDPARENT**

Full Flake
How heartless are you?

OLD TEACHER

Quarter Flake
It'll be even sadder than your high school reunion.

FRIEND'S PET

Empty packet
It's not like you and Fluffy ever really clicked.



Words by Kimberly Gillan

I'd just applied a final swipe of mascara and was about to head out the door when my phone beeped twice. "So sorry, won't be able to make dinner – just scored free tickets to a gig!" one text said. "I've had a rough day at work... just need to go home," the other lamented.

I'd recently moved to Sydney from Melbourne and was desperately missing girls' nights over tapas and cocktails. So when I heard two former university acquaintances were also living in Sydney, I dropped them a Facebook message and organised Friday night drinks. My brain had conjured a cosy image of the three of us clinking our glasses to celebrate our newfound friendship, but instead I found myself swapping my heels for Ugg boots and zesty mojitos for a lonely glass of pinot noir.

I'm sure their excuses were genuine, but it's case-in-point for a generation that considers bailing at the last minute the norm. In years gone by, an RSVP was akin to an oath, but nowadays no-shows and last-minute flimsy excuses are common, thanks, mostly, to our mobile phones and Facebook. "Our parents couldn't just text somebody to say they were going to be late – they had to get there," says psychologist Victoria Kasunic. Now technology provides a convenient buffer in awkward ⇨

encounters. "We let technology be the interface between people so we don't have to hear the emotional pain in their voice," explains social researcher Mark McCrindle. "We can just tap away – it makes breaking a commitment or flaking on a friend easier to do."

But this phenomenon is having a bigger impact than just leaving people sulking on their sofas. "As a society, we are almost losing trust in events," McCrindle explains. "We might have been invited to a big gathering, but we're not sure if it's going to

"TODAY, WE WANT OUR FRIENDSHIPS TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE TO OUR NEEDS"

happen as we are so used to things getting cancelled at short notice." As a result, people often seem to say yes to invitations immediately, with the idea that they'll see how they're actually placed closer to the date.

"Our culture is very much versed in the idea of 'doing better' and 'being better'," says Dr Lauren Rosewarne, political scientist and senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne. "There's always a better boyfriend, lipstick or car around the corner, and

we don't like committing to things in case something better comes along."

It doesn't help that we're all so stretched trying to balance work, family and friendship expectations. "In the moment, I think people genuinely want to go, but they haven't factored in everything else they're going to be doing that week," says Kasunic. McCrindle adds that he believes we are overindulged with events and social engagements. "It's not that we're less committed to friends today, but we want our friendships to be more flexible and responsive to our needs, rather than adding more structure and to-dos," he points out.

The nature in which we engage with friends will keep shifting as technology advances, so the challenge is to find a way to comfortably straddle the formal, thank-you-card etiquette of the '50s and our modern social-networked world. "We're almost bridging two types of etiquette – this one has arrived without written rules and we're making them up as we go along," says McCrindle.

Informal Friday night catch-ups aside, the nuances surrounding event RSVPs are a particular source of confusion and unintentional offence.

"It can cause angst when traditional etiquette is imported into the modern time," says McCrindle. "This happens at weddings, where the couple print the invitation and expect a posted RSVP in return – some people bypass that with a text, which puts people out because they're applying a set of etiquette and expect a certain form of response."

A good rule of thumb is to respond by using the same format as the invitation. "If you offer an individual invitation, then you expect an individual response and some kind of commitment," says McCrindle. "But if you send out a mass invitation via

email or Facebook, I don't think you can expect a personal RSVP."

If a friend can't manage to respond with a text, email or social-media message, then you might have to question their value to you. "We will love some people enough to put up with their impoliteness, but we'll decide others are simply not worth the hassle and inconvenience," says Dr Rosewarne.

Kasunic says this problem is a symptom of a generation that doesn't forward-plan. "We need to learn to plan our lives better, scheduling in time for rest and social activities

because going out every night can be exhausting," she says. "That way you can fit in everything you want, and you don't have to let anyone down." □

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Sick of last-minute pull-outs? Tweet us your etiquette advice and tag

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GENERATION CANCELLATION

The risk of being *stood up by your friends* is a peril of modern womanhood. So when did RSVPs become so *unreliable*?