Conflicted about having sex for the first time

Dear Alice,

I am an 18-year-old virgin, but my boyfriend wants to have sex with me. We have been dating now for eight months, and he says he has been waiting long enough. I have this fear of having sex because of the consequences, but I try to tell myself that as long as I use protection, things like that shouldn't happen.

I'm not sure what I'm asking for; I'm not sure it's advice either. Right now I'm reasonably sure that I don't want to have sex, but this little voice (probably his) keeps asking "What's the big deal?"

I know it's not a big deal, but it's something I really believe in, and I want to wait. I only have one life to live and I want to do it right. I did a lot of things I ended up regretting, but this is really important to me. The only thing is, I have no problems fantasizing about making love to him. I just have trouble with carrying out the actual act. I really need to ask if you think my fear of sex is unnatural or just a product of the way I've been raised?

Is there any way I can get over all the horror stories of regret and painful first times and just give myself to the guy of my dreams?

— Confused

Answer

Dear Confused,

Kudos to you for being thoughtful about this topic, as it can be a big decision for some people. Whether or not you choose to have sex, it’s great that you’re considering your own values and comfort. Doing so will make your experience, if or when you have sex, more enjoyable. People choose to have sex or not for any number of reasons, but ultimately, the decision is about what feels right for you. Even though your boyfriend is ready, it’s critical that he’s respectful of your decision and your feelings about it. This situation can be an opportunity for you both to discuss the issue and try to understand each other’s perspectives, which could strengthen your relationship in the long term. Though it sounds like you’re not ready to have sex right now, it may be good to reflect on how you might feel or what you might do if you do choose to have sex in the
future.

There can be a lot to consider when deciding to have sex or not, so you're not alone in feeling confused. It’s helpful to first think about your wants and needs. How do you want to feel about a person before having sex? What would it take for you to feel ready to have sex? Being able to reflect on these questions may help you clearly communicate why you aren’t ready to have sex right now. As you and your partner continue these conversations, some questions to explore might include: why is there pressure to have sex now? What would having sex mean for the relationship? Are there other sexual or romantic activities in which you both would feel comfortable engaging? If you both decide to have sex, do you feel prepared to practice safer sex [2]?

It’s wise to continue exploring your feelings of closeness with your boyfriend. You may want to keep talking with him about what you’re interested and excited to do with him — socially, romantically, sexually — as well as the things you’re not willing to do with him. Perhaps there are ways that both of you can get your needs met while not having sex.

If you do decide to have sex, discussing which contraceptive options you can agree to use together to reduce the risk of STIs and pregnancy is recommended. There are a lot of products on the market, so you may consider talking with your health care provider or health promotion specialist to determine which option is best for you. In the meantime, you could check out Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health [3] archives for more information.

Sex can be wonderful if or when you choose to have it, but the key is figuring out what is the best situation for you — the when, where, and with whom, are up to you.

Good luck!

Alice!

Category:
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Relationship Stuff [5]
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Related questions

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Definition of sex? [9]

Resources

Safer Sex Map (Morningside/ Barnard) [10]
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Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [12]
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