Hi Alice,

How common is it for college couples to move in together while still being undergrads? My boyfriend and I have been dating for two years and plan on getting an apartment the following year. However, we worry that if we attend graduate schools in different areas, having to then live apart may harm our relationship. Also, how can I convince my parents to accept the idea (I have already tried having an open discussion but they reject the idea completely even though they love my boyfriend). His parents have already said that this would not be a problem. Also, my parents help finance my housing so it would be difficult to move in without their approval.

Thanks for your help,
confused

Answer

Dear confused,

Sounds like you're in a complicated situation! Breaking these issues down into relationship logistics (are you and your partner ready to move in together?) and other logistics (your parents’ support, your finances, not to mention where you might live) may help to clarify whether or not you want to sign that lease. Although it was once fairly rare, it's becoming more common for young unmarried couples to live together, a trend that has been increasing since the 1960s. Recent U.S. Census Bureau data shows that nine percent of unmarried couples between the ages of 18 and 24 cohabitate, compared to seven percent of married couples in that age range. That being said, it’s wise to consider, as you’re already doing, the various logistical concerns before committing to joining that nine percent.

First, relationship logistics: Before you start apartment hunting, it may be helpful to consider all of the reasons you may and may not want to move in with your partner. What is your primary reason for considering moving in together? Research shows that people move in together for a number of reasons, including a desire to be closer to each other, financial incentives, and testing compatibility of a couple. If you’re pushing for this step in order to test the strength of your relationship, you may want to think twice. A study found that people who moved in together with that motivation experienced more negative communication and lower relationship adjustment,
confidence, and dedication. It may help to make a list of pros and cons — how would living with your partner be different, better, or worse than living with a different roommate or alone? You mention that you're concerned about going to graduate schools in different locations — are you moving in together to be closer to each other now? Does it make sense for your relationship as it is currently, or are you trying to prevent breaking up later? Ultimately, considering your motivations can be a helpful way to determine if living together is a genuine desire for both of you, or if it’s precipitated by other factors.

On to some other logistics: Before you decide to move in together, it may be wise to discuss finances and other household issues, as these are common sources of arguments and stress for cohabitating couples. To get started on the same page, you can confirm that you’re both in agreement about who will pay what bills before you sign a lease. And, although it might be strange to talk about some what ifs, a conversation about what will happen financially if you break up (i.e., bills, lease, finding new roommates), may not be a bad idea. You might also consider where you would be living with your partner. Will you have friends nearby? Will you be able to pursue school and your interests easily? Getting a head start on financial concerns before they arise could help reduce potential conflict later on.

On that note, since you mention that your parents aren’t completely supportive of this idea, and you rely on them for financial assistance, you may want to try to talk to them again. Be prepared to listen to their concerns. Are they worried about your grades? Are they morally against non-married couples living together? It’s up to you to determine how much your parents’ approval or what level of influence factors into your decision to move forward. It’s possible that their disapproval could put additional strain on your relationship with your partner, and not just financially. When you talk to your parents, you could start by outlining the pros and cons you’ve identified. It’s great that your parents already like your partner, but their resistance could indicate that they’re concerned for you. Being prepared to talk about your concerns, and to listen to theirs, is a good way to demonstrate your maturity and to show them that you’re serious about this living situation. That said, you might also want to prepare yourself to accept no for an answer, at least at first. It may take time for your parents to support the idea of living with your partner, or they may never support it. In the latter case, consider that you still have options, such as living with your parents’ decision, getting a job to earn money to pay your own rent, or continuing the discussion at a later date. For more advice on having tough conversations with parents, check out the Go Ask Alice! Talking With Parents [2] category.

Finally, you asked about long-distance relationships. These can be complicated, but they aren’t doomed. Many couples make long-distance work, some for long periods of time. The Go Ask Alice! Long Distance and On-Line Relationships [3] category has specific suggestions on how to make it work. By communicating openly with your partner and your parents, you'll be on your way to sorting out a living situation.

Best of luck talking this all through,

Alice!

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