History lesson ? how do I ask about my partner's past? [1]

Alice,

How would I go about asking a partner about his past?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Do you want to ask about your partner's ancestry? Details about his hometown? Or, do you want to know what he was like in fifth grade? If you want to find out more about your partner's life, go ahead and ask, share, inquire. If you're unsure of where to start, how about something like: "Honey/Buttercup/Big Papa, I really like you, and I want to get to know you better. Can I ask you about _______?" You can be playful and respectful ? getting to know funny little tidbits of information about each other can be a big turn-on.

If by "past," you mean sexual history, to be safer for both of you, try to be sensitive when bringing up this topic. A private, comfortable setting is a good place to start ? snuggling on the couch, resting in the park, eating dinner at home or at a quiet restaurant corner. You might want to consider staying away from the bedroom for this talk.

Think about what information you want to learn from your discussion. Why do you want to ask about your partner's history in the first place? Do you want to know how many sexual partners and/or what forms of sexual contact he's had? Are you interested in knowing when/if he's been tested for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV? Or, if there's any reason to think you might be at risk? Would it make you feel closer and safer to know these details about your partner's past sexual activities? Are you worried about your or your partner's sexual health? When you ask, make sure to communicate the concerns that are pushing you to ask.

It's up to you to bring up the topic in a way that fits your needs and your relationship; here are a couple of suggestions on how to get the conversation started ? feel free to modify them, or use your own ideas, in any way you feel is appropriate to your particular situation:

- "Hey, I think it's time for that talk. Yup, *that* one."
- "This is really hard or awkward to talk about, but have you ever been tested for HIV? [Wait for a response? Move right along?] Maybe we can get tested together?"

You might also reassure your partner that you care about him and that you want to learn,
support, and figure out which precautions to take, not to pry or judge him or his previous behavior.

Just to be safe, prepare yourself for answers you might not expect, and remember that he could be sensitive to your reactions. Try to avoid assumptions and reactions that might come off as judgements (like laughing or impressed whistles). Also, be willing to offer your own personal information as you ask for his. It’s only fair that the sharing go both ways and it might serve to strengthen your relationship even further.

Good luck!

Alice!

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