Dear Alice,

I'm a freshman with a problem. I have a roommate who masturbates every night and it makes me sick. She waits until she thinks I'm asleep and then really goes at it. One night she even woke me up after I was asleep. I find it disgusting to hear her moans of passion as she plays with herself. Should I tell her to stop or should I just find another roommate?

?Disgusted

Answer

Dear Disgusted,

A good rule when someone is doing something that bothers, annoys, or irritates you is to let her/him know of your irritation and give her/him a chance to change. You may always take more drastic measures later. (This is a really helpful tip in any type of relationship — how many times have you heard someone say, "I didn't realize that bothered you!"?)

Of course, sex may be much harder to talk about because it's personal and private. To her credit, your roommate does wait until she thinks you're asleep before she goes at it. People sometimes masturbate as a way to release tension or fall asleep. Maybe you could first try a simple face-saving tactic like rolling over and asking, "Are you okay?" when she starts to moan.

If dropping hints doesn't work, you could be more direct with your roommate. When approaching this potentially awkward conversation, think about what you want to change: Do you want your roommate to wait until you are asleep before masturbating? Do you need your roommate to be quieter? Do you want your roommate to masturbate in another space before coming to bed? Maybe you'd prefer your roommate to masturbate at another time when you're not around? Perhaps you feel that your privacy is being invaded? Or, if you're disgusted by masturbation, you might want to read about female sexuality and the functions of masturbation.

Also consider sexual words that you're comfortable using, or any metaphors that will let her know that you're awake and offended. Try practicing a few different lines beforehand so that you're comfortable when you start the conversation. If you decide to talk with her about her masturbatory habits, try to make sure you address:
• What's been going on? specifically, what you hear at night.
• How it affects you; how you feel (i.e., offended, uncomfortable, etc.).
• What needs to change; ideas for changing the situation? what options you see for her.

If you can't come to an agreement, ear plugs (typically available at drug stores) or asking for a room change will likely do the trick. You may also want to read No privacy to masturbate [3] for some more ideas about how to resolve this situation from the other person's perspective.

Try giving your roommate a chance by engaging in an honest discussion with clear next steps. Mastering the art of negotiation and forming consensus with roommates will make handfuls of future sticky situations with other people a cinch!

Alice!
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