Roommate attempted suicide, now wants to move back in

Dear Alice,

My roommate attempted suicide and I found her in the bathroom. She wants to come back to school next semester but I don't think she is better even though she has received professional help. How can I ever trust her again and feel comfortable? I am scared constantly at being alone with her. What do I do? How can I tell her about my fears?

?Scared

Answer

Dear Scared,

Finding your roommate after a suicide attempt was probably something you'll never forget. At that time, whether you wanted to, or not, you entered into your roommate's struggles in a very personal way. Although time has passed and your roommate sought professional help, it's understandable that you may doubt her readiness to make another try at school. What's more, it sounds like you may be worried that you'll be put in a similar situation and that's really scary. It's natural to feel uneasy or afraid and to look for ways to quell your discomfort.

You mentioned talking with your roommate about your fears. It seems that your unease would be lessened if you could express your concerns. Also, it sounds like you want to know if she still thinks about killing herself. If so, will she act on it? It's possible that this talk could make you feel relieved and confident your roommate's not going to attempt suicide again. On the other hand, it's possible that you'll learn she's a little ambivalent about life. You can probably imagine that the later outcome wouldn't serve your goal of lessening discomfort. It might help to determine exactly what your goals would be for this type of conversation before you approach her. You might also consider making a plan on how to proceed if the chat goes well, and a plan in case it does not.

Regardless of the approach, how would you feel about reaching out for some professional support during these times? You may be wondering why in the world you would go to counseling if it's your roommate that attempted suicide? Well, it's clear that your roommate's mental health has become a source of stress for you and it's no small thing to find someone after they tried to take their own life. You're on the front lines, and it might help you to get some outside support. Here are a couple of thoughts to consider. In what ways would it help you to talk freely about your discomfort with day-to-day living with your roommate? And, what
would it be like for you to talk openly, with a counselor, about your memories and worries of what could happen in the future?

If you're ready to talk to a counselor, you can talk to your primary care provider for a referral. If you are a student, your school's student counseling center is there for you.

It's obvious that you care about your roommate. You are both going through some very hard times. It's virtually impossible for anyone to deal with life or death issues alone, and memories of near-death experiences can linger and cause negative effects. For these reasons, it's so important for both of you to reach out for help. You already took the first step by writing? please continue to take care of yourself by taking the next step.

Alice!
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