Dear Alice,

I have been involved in a relationship with my girl for over a year now. We both love each other and are very happy. We met in college and spent the summer together in an apartment. Both of us have two years of college left, but unfortunately we do not attend the same school. The problem is that I fell "in love" with her by the end of the summer and then suddenly we were separated.

We had many discussions about our relationship and she told me that she is not ready to commit to eventually be married one day. Here is where the problem is: I starting college this spring and my girl is stuck in Maine. I just want to know if I am wasting my time on a long distance relationship with no promise of resulting in marriage after our college years. The thought also occurred to me that when she starts college, will she be so committed to this long distance relationship? I just don't want to be played for a fool.

? Nice Guy or Fool?

Answer

Dear Nice Guy or Fool?,

You?re faced with a question that many have considered over the ages. Long distance relationships are challenging, even when a couple has been together for a long time. The idea of carrying on a relationship across the miles and worrying about whether or not there is, or might ever be, a commitment can certainly be stressful. It?s great that you?ve talked about what the future might look like for the two of you, but perhaps there?s more to discuss moving forward.

Have you and your girlfriend discussed monogamy? How about the future after you both complete college? Have you had a chat about your individual short- and long-term goals? Is it possible you?re getting a little ahead of yourself? If so, perhaps it's time for you two to talk a bit more. In order to get some clarity, you can discuss your relationship further by focusing on questions like: What do you each want out of your relationship? What are you each getting out of the relationship ? now, in the past, and in the future? What are your needs in a relationship? Are they being met across the distance? Can they be met over time? What are the terms to which you are both willing to agree to continue this relationship across the miles?

The good news is you have a lot of options (despite what romantic comedies and fairy tales
might have you believe). Even monogamy and commitment can look different from relationship to relationship. It could mean that you both agree to just date one another and see what happens. You can also agree to date and make a commitment to get married in two years. On the other hand, you can agree to see other people, with the idea of making a commitment solely to each other in two years. Another option might be that you both agree to see other people and see what happens; etc. The key is to make this decision, whatever it may be, together. It may be a painstaking process, especially determining the details of your agreement. But, if you can both spend some time exploring the questions you have about the relationship and generate feasible solutions, you’ll likely be able to come to a compromise that you both can accept.

Remember, if what you first decide to do isn't working for one, or both, of you, invite your partner to go back to the drawing board and redefine the terms. Relationships, near or far, are a constant process? and a lot of work. If you’re both willing to do that work, then your relationship has a better chance of lasting the years of separation.

Best of luck clarifying your needs and goals together,

Alice!

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