Dinner does not equal sex [1]

Dear Alice,

I was looking through your column and thought that I should ask your advice on a rather sensitive matter. I recently invited a guy over for dinner at my house. We had a great time together, yet he presumed that he was going to sleep with me and insisted that I had led him on during the main course of the evening. I do not see how this is possible, but this guy keeps on hassling me for sex and I do not want to lose him as a friend, but I really do not see him as a sexual partner. What should I do?

Yours,
Worried

Answer

Dear Worried,

While the world of dating is sometimes confusing, there's one thing that is always clear: no one "owes" anyone sex, no matter what. Consensual sex happens when all individuals involved willingly agree to engage in specific sexual acts; it is never okay for someone to make you feel pressured into engaging in any form of sexual activity. If your friend's advances continue, you may try talking to him and explaining that you're not interested in a relationship beyond friendship. Being honest and direct may help clear up any confusion. If, after the conversation, he still doesn't seem to understand your stance on the situation you may consider re-evaluating his place in your life.

Worried, even if, on the night this guy was at your apartment, you made out with him for an hour, even if you took off your clothes, even if you went so far as to say something like, "I really want to make love with you," and then led him into the bedroom and, at the last minute, changed your mind and decided that it just wasn't the right thing for you, and you told him, and then he felt really, really disappointed, you still do not owe him sex? at all.
You mention you would like to maintain the friendship, but you also don’t want him to continue making these advances. A frank conversation, in person or on the phone, may be the best way to get your message across. An email or a letter could work as well, although sometimes the tone of an email can be difficult to interpret. For an issue like this, a face-to-face conversation can help you be clear and direct about how you feel. Regardless of your mode of communication, one message you might try to convey is that you don’t want to risk losing him as a friend, but you’re uncomfortable with the way he’s treating you.

Telling him how you feel may seem difficult; however, speaking up when someone does something that bothers or upsets you is a key part of any healthy relationship. To make it a little easier, you can plan ahead for your conversation by thinking about the possible ways he might react, so you’re prepared. He may feel awfully about his behavior and vow to change, he may simply listen without saying much, or he may be upset and not want to talk. Either way, focus on the points you would like to convey; in time, he will process what you’ve said.

In order to increase the chances of being heard, you could consider the following steps when planning or having this conversation:

1. Describe the situation? “I enjoy your company and appreciate your friendship, but lately you’ve been pressuring me to have sex with you.”
2. Tell him how you feel about what’s happening? “I feel uncomfortable and don’t like being pressured. I’m not interested in having sex with you. The pressure you’re placing on me is creating a situation where I’m not having fun with you anymore.”
3. Tell him what you want to happen? “I don’t want to lose our friendship, but we can only stay friends if we’re both comfortable with each other. This means not talking about having sex, not kissing, not touching, and not hassling me. If you can’t stop pressuring me about sex, then I can’t be friends with you.”

You can try using your own words to sound natural, and stick to the 1-2-3 framework for clarity. The point of confronting this person in this way is to make your message extraordinarily clear? you’re unhappy with his behavior, not him as a person. Condemning him as a person ? i.e., "you’re really a jerk for continually wanting to have sex with me when I don’t want to" ? could put him on the defensive and sets you up for an uncomfortable fight.

After you speak (or write) to him, if he doesn’t respond to your requests, or if he still just doesn’t "get it," you may feel compelled to think about your next steps. What would allow you to feel most comfortable? Some steps may include:

- Summarizing your feelings and requests in a letter or email (if you haven’t already).
- Referring him to resources that describe what factors into a healthy relationship [2].
- Asking him not to call, email, or visit you in-person.
- Telling him you’re not interested in seeing or talking with him.
- Avoiding him if you happen to be in the same location.
- You may choose to talk to someone, such as a counselor, a health promotion specialist, or an advocate in your school’s violence prevention center, to help sort out your feelings and options.

You may find rehearsing the conversation with a friend or counselor helpful. You could even ask a friend to be available when you talk with him, so you can call and debrief immediately. Hopefully things will go smoothly, however, if you have ended the friendship, and he
continues to contact or pressure you in any way, then this is no longer pressure, it may be crossing the line into harassment, a legal issue, and a crime. For more information about harassment and how to handle it, check out Nonconsensual Relationships category in the Go Ask Alice! archives.

With some contemplation and planning, you'll be well on your way to addressing this problem.

Best of luck to you.

Alice!
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