Dear Alice,

I have a problem with my girlfriend of one year. She feels more than I do in our relationship and thus has decided that she needs to break off our relationship. I feel very comfortable with the relationship but I understand that to be supportive I must do everything I can to make her happy. I know it’s not my responsibility, but as her boyfriend I want her to be happy regardless. If she tells me to leave, I know I must, but what do I do about our relationship after that? How do I react to this situation?

Signed,
Concerned

Answer

Dear Concerned,

This must be a very difficult situation for both of you. You feel comfortable with the relationship and it sounds as though you would like for it to continue, while she feels like something is missing and thus seems to want to break it off. You said that she has decided she needs to end the relationship and you also say you’d like to know what to do “if she tells me to leave.” Has she already ended the relationship? Do you feel like she is still open to talking things through with you? If she is willing to continue talking about the relationship or willing to try to work things out, it may be worth getting some clarity about what she is wanting that she feels she is not getting. When you have a clear picture of this, you can decide if you can give her what she is wanting.

In relationships, both people have wants and needs they hope will be met by their partner. Both people may not always be on the same page about these needs, however. People differ on how much commitment they want to offer, how quickly they want to move, how intimate they want to be physically and/or emotionally, how they want to spend their time together, how they want to communicate, and many other aspects of being in a relationship. So when these needs and wants come into conflict, both members of the couple must decide if it makes the most sense to try to work it out, or to call it quits. And you are correct: If one member of the couple decides it’s over, then by definition, it’s over. It takes both people wanting to make it work in order to make it work.

If you feel content in the relationship, it may be worth expressing to her, if she is open to hearing it, what about the relationship, and what about her, pleases you. If you feel strongly
you would like to try to provide whatever is missing, it may be worth expressing this to her, as well. Perhaps you have done this already, and it still has not worked out. This is not easy, but ultimately, it is better for both people if an unhappy person walks away from a relationship rather than stay in one that's not working. Check out Getting over divorce pain? [2] and Friends with your ex? [3] for some thoughts on your question about what to do if you are breaking up, a question that most people ask themselves at least once (if not many) times during their lives.

Alice!
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