Dear Alice,

I am a student at Columbia College who has a big crush on a friend of mine. While we are pretty close, I am not interested in ruining a good relationship if he isn't interested. The thing is that I have begun recently picturing myself married to this guy in thirty years and seeing him across the breakfast table talking about our kids. I've never felt this way about a guy before. It has usually been more superficial. I keep meaning to tell him but I get really shy because of my fear of destroying our friendship. I think about him often. What should I do?

Sincerely,
Looking for a little advice from a third party

Answer

Dear Looking for a little advice from a third party,

It's great that you have met someone that you feel that strongly about. However, before you start planning your future thirty years down the road, it might be wise to find out if the feelings are mutual. Although you could wait to see how things develop naturally, the most direct route would be to have a conversation about how you feel.

You are already in a good position for talking to your friend about your feelings since you are close. Friendships can often weather a conversation about these feelings, even if starting the conversation is difficult or awkward.

Before you jump into the heart-to-heart, think about what you want to say and how he may react. Do you want to tell him you'd like to date? Or that you really like him and want to see where things go? What are some different possibilities of how he might respond? Once you've thought about the conversation, try to choose a time and place that won't be awkward and will make you both comfortable. You may want to talk with a friend or a counselor prior to the conversation to figure out what you want to say, what you are hoping to hear from him, and how you will deal with his response, whether it is good or bad.

If your friend doesn't share your feelings, how will you feel? If maintaining the friendship is your top priority, try letting him know you don't want to lose him as a friend. This way if the feelings are not mutual, you have made it easier for him to tell you that he wants to stay friends and you have (hopefully) salvaged the friendship. Of course, after a conversation of this nature, it may be a little while before the friendship gets back to "normal." That's okay.
You also have the option of making a move, physically, and seeing how he responds. However, an unexpected and unwanted advance may really catch him off guard and force him to react abruptly without having the chance to consider your feelings. Alternatively, he might welcome the physical aspect of the relationship, but without talking, it won't be possible to know if he's interested in a casual physical connection or a more serious relationship. Depending on your friend's reaction, it might be difficult for the friendship to recover.

If you feel strongly that you can't talk to him about it, some other options are 1) waiting to see how things develop (a.k.a. waiting to see if your friend makes a move) and hiding your feelings (at least verbally ? flirting optional) or 2) ignoring your feelings for your friend and keeping yourself open to the possibility of being attracted to someone else. Although you only have eyes for your friend right now, you may meet someone else who makes you feel the same way.

To some, the idea of starting this type of conversation is scary and causes lots of anxiety. Some worry about the end of the conversation ? particularly the possibility of rejection. For others, the idea of holding in true feelings is scarier than the thought of being rejected. Where do you fall? If you decide to talk to him about it, be honest about your feelings and hopes. After all, nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

Alice!
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