Stay with boyfriend or move on? [1]

Dear Alice,

My boyfriend and I have been together for three years. Living together for two, I have supported us financially pretty much since the beginning of the relationship since he has not had steady work. We enjoy being together most of the time and his work prospects have recently greatly improved. However, I have a male friend (unknown to my boyfriend ? he doesn't believe that women should have men as friends) who is attracted to me and I had a brief emotional affair with him (no sex).

Although I know I don't want a serious relationship with my friend, I think about him a lot and I can't achieve orgasm with my boyfriend without thinking about the closeness and warmth I experienced with this other man. My boyfriend and I have had our share of relationship problems and I have tried to break up with him, but somehow I always end up agreeing to try harder to make things work. But even though I don't really want my friend, I can't get him off my mind. I wonder if I do need to break up with my boyfriend!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Do you need to break up with your boyfriend? The decision to end things with a partner can be a difficult one. The thing is, only you can know for sure if that's the path you want to take. The dynamics of a relationship are only known to those involved, making it difficult for another to decide whether you should stay or go. And while the ins and outs of your particular situation are murky to even you, there are some steps you can take to gain clarification.

Since there are a number of issues to sort through, it may help to think about them one at a time. First, it seems as if you feel this other man is meeting your needs for closeness and warmth in a way that your boyfriend...is not. Does this sound correct? It may help to sit down alone and identify the specific emotions that this other man fosters in you. How do you feel when you are with him? What differences are there between the ways the two of you interact in comparison to you and your boyfriend? This type of thought process might lead you to a deeper understanding of why you are considering leaving your current relationship.

Next, it is normal and quite common, in fact, for people to find themselves attracted to other people while in a relationship. It is also reasonable to enjoy the company of many people, and to seek different friendships, each having their special elements. One question to ask is, Why
does your boyfriend believe that women should not have male friends? Have you ever discussed his concerns about this? What are your reasons for wanting male companionship outside of your romantic relationship? These might be some areas to explore with your boyfriend, even without discussing your emotional closeness to your friend.

Some other things to consider might be how supporting your boyfriend financially has made you feel, how he seems to feel about this issue, and what, if any, impact this has had on your relationship. You've also stated that you and your boyfriend have had difficulties before, leading you to attempt, repeatedly, to break off the relationship. What has caused you to change your mind and "agree to try harder?" Has this been fueled by your interest in preserving the relationship, or have you felt pressured by your boyfriend? How has this left you feeling?

Mulling things over with someone you trust may help. Do you have a close friend or family member you can talk to? Writing can also help. Some people find it easier to sort through their feelings by writing them out. Another option is to talk to a counselor. You can speak to your health care provider about a referral. Whatever you decide to do, the first step might be to give yourself some space to think about your feelings and needs. Take care.

Alice!
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