Dear Alice,

My new live in boyfriend can't go to sleep without a TV on. I need a quiet dark room to go to sleep. He wants to sleep with me but he can't. He ends up getting up and falling asleep on the couch in front of the TV. How long will it take him to adjust to sleeping without the TV?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many people in relationships can say they are keenly aware their partners sleep habits; whether it be getting kicked awake mid-dream or never getting to sleep at all due to loud snoring. Being able to comfortably share a bed with a partner can take time and may not work for all couples. Unfortunately there’s no set schedule for how long it can take a person to learn to sleep in a new environment.

Have you talked with your partner about how he would like to approach finding a solution? Is it the actual programs he watches? Is it just background noise? Does he use the TV to help his mind drift so he’s not kept awake by thought of school, work, or other responsibilities? Is it just an old habit? Perhaps you might start with working together to identify why needing the TV to fall asleep is important to your partner.

The National Sleep Foundation reports that an individual who watches television or uses the computer within an hour of going to bed, especially in the bedroom, hinders the overall quality of sleep. Since your partner seems amenable to looking for options, perhaps he would consider using a personal audio device with headphones instead of watching TV. He could listen to audio books or perhaps a guided meditation, which has been proven to help manage stress. You could also think about wireless headphones connected to a radio, television, or other source.

If this does not work, perhaps you could stagger your bedtimes. He could fall asleep with the TV, and then you could go in to the bedroom after that and have a quiet, dark space to go to sleep. Or would you be open to adding some “white noise,” such as a fan, air conditioner, or white noise machine? Perhaps that could help your partner fall asleep without interrupting your sleep. Additionally you could try using ear plugs and an eye mask to help address your need for dark and quiet sleep spaces.
In the end, don't feel embarrassed if none of these ideas work for you and your boyfriend. Sleeping separately is very common, even among couples who have been together for decades.

All the best in finding the right balance that support both you in bed.

Alice!
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