Dear Alice,

I enjoy reading the new Q&As every week and I would appreciate it if you could help me. How do you get a person to appreciate you? I always go out of my way for my boyfriend, but he never seems to do the same for me. For example, today he is leaving for the long weekend and instead of choosing to be with me last night, he went to a club and didn't call me until 3 o'clock in the morning. I'm at my breaking point. Can you help me?

Alex

Answer

Dear Alex,

Have you told your boyfriend how you feel? Is he aware that this is a concern of yours or is it possible that he doesn't know how his actions have affected you? If you haven't before, letting him know what's on your mind and how his actions make you feel is a good starting point. If you don't feel you're both on the same page after a conversation or if you've talked to him about this previously and it still remains an issue, you may want to consider whether you're getting what you want from this relationship.

If you haven't yet spoken to your partner about your concerns, there are a few ways to prepare for a constructive conversation. First, try to see whether you can both set aside a time and place for your discussion. Choosing a time when you both will be relaxed, have enough time, and can minimize interruptions will set the stage for a meaningful heart-to-heart.

Before your talk, take some time on your own to think about what you want to tell him. It may be helpful for you to write down your thoughts and feelings first. In order to try to encourage him to be as open as possible, it's wise to avoid being accusatory. Though your feelings may be hurt, doing so may only put him on the defensive and reduce the chances of a productive conversation. It's also a good idea to use "I" statements and give specific examples of times when you felt unappreciated, including the one you mention in your question. You might say, "Last weekend, when you went to the club before leaving for the long weekend, I felt unwanted and unappreciated. I wondered why you went to the club instead of spending time with me." This may be more thought-provoking for him than if you were to say, "You never want to spend time with me and you don't ever appreciate anything I do for you."

It's also good to keep an objective (or objectives) in mind prior to your chat. What specific
change(s) would you like to see as a result of the conversation? Do you want to set aside more concrete plans for one-on-one time with your beau in the future? In what way(s) would you like for your partner to show that he appreciates you? Try to keep them specific and actionable. Once you’ve got the discussion going, try to listen carefully to what he says and how he responds. It may be worth it to try to see the situation from his view—even if you don’t agree with it. When it comes time to talk solutions to the issue at hand, be ready to share a few proposals and ask your beau for suggestions as well. Then, go through the pros and cons of each together. It’s good to keep in mind that deciding which one might work for you both may require some compromises. If you’re able to come to a solution together, make time in the near future to check in and see how it’s working out for you both.

Bottom line: While you can’t make another person change, you can let her/him in on your thoughts and feelings and see what s/he does with that insight. If you find you’re having trouble communicating, it may be a good idea to bring in a professional to help mediate the process, such as a couple’s counselor. Over time, if you continue to feel the same way in your current relationship, you might want to consider if staying with your partner is right for you.

Alice!
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