Dear Alice,

I've been going out with my boyfriend for almost five months and I love him very much. We get along great and enjoy spending time together. However, sometimes I feel like we spend too much time together. I barely have time for work and school and still make him happy. If I tell him I'm busy he says he's okay with it, but later he gets mad at me for not making enough time for him and doesn't think I'm as committed to our relationship as he is.

This especially bothers me because I have pretty much lost my three best friends. They were never really crazy about him to begin with, but I didn't expect them to be best friends too. Ever since we have been going out, they do not ask me to do anything, yet I haven't really asked them to do anything either. I want to know how I can explain to him that even though I like spending time with him, I need time for other friends too. I don't plan on breaking up with my boyfriend, but if I did, I'm afraid my friends wouldn't take me back. I want to be able to make time for both.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Nurturing and maintaining existing friendships when love comes to town can be hard. Do these sayings, "He swept me off my feet!" or "He rocked my world!" sound familiar? It's common for people tend to get a little disoriented and distracted when they fall in love.

Would you believe that you're running into a very common relationship difficulty?

Very few people have a natural knack for maintaining great friendships and a serious relationship. Instead, people often learn through experiences, like the ones you are having now. It seems that the steps you might consider taking will involve introspection, conversations, and a lot of practice.

First, as you've already done, it's important to clarify relationship priorities. As you think about what's important to you, consider the amount of time you have to spend with your friends and boyfriend. What is reasonable? How do you like spending time with them? What is the balance that will give you the time to do everything you 'need' to do and the things you 'want' to do?

Second, it'll help you and them to talk it out. Try inviting your friends and boyfriend into one-on-one conversations with you about your and their relationship priorities. You might want to
begin each conversation by telling them how much they mean to you. Also, they may be more interested if you tell them that you want to talk about things that will improve your relationships. You can encourage them to be honest and open by the way you speak and through your body language. By maintaining open body posture (open arms, un-crossed legs, a slight lean toward them) you communicate open-ness. By listening more than you talk, you convey genuine concern and care. As you and your friends/boyfriend share your inner thoughts and feelings, you will become closer and learn what's important to each other.

After priorities are made clear (including time for school and work) and you have some good talks? it'll be time to practice walking the walk. You might feel a little pull at your heart when you go to hang out with friends, as opposed to your boyfriend. Yet, as you know, it's important to stay connected and follow-through with your promises to yourself and your friends. As you act on your new commitments, it'll help to keep lines of communication going with your boyfriend and friends. Consider checking in with them to see if you they are satisfied with the time you spend with them and the way you spend it.

While it's hard to learn new ways of thinking and being, you and your relationships will be better off because of your willingness to do so. It's great that you want to work on ways to mend your friendships while still having the time and energy for school, work, and your boyfriend.

Alice!
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