Dear Alice,

I have just entered into my first real relationship with a guy that I really like. The problem is, he's incredibly bright. So much so that it intimidates me a little. He doesn't brag or make me feel unintelligent (and I know I'm not), it's just a part of who he is. He cares a lot about me, but I want to feel that our relationship is more than physical. I've always valued intelligence, and I really enjoy being with this guy, but there is an aspect of him that I'm not able to be a part of. Thanks for your help.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your guy may be incredibly bright, but let it be said that you are, too. Having the courage to look at your relationship in the sophisticated way you are, and seeking to understand it, takes a high level of what some people call "EQ": emotional intelligence quotient.

The reasons why two people get along and make good romantic partners are as varied as humans are. Some couples share similar backgrounds, or like the same kinds of books, movies, art, or food. Others are compatible intellectually and/or emotionally, or work together on projects they find fulfilling. Some have seen one another through hard times, some have a passionate sexual connection, and some quietly support each other despite different interests, beliefs, or goals. Most relationships go through stages, with the connection waxing and waning, evolving, and growing.

Each person brings his or her own unique talents and perspectives to the activities and communication that happen in a relationship. When you think about times you spend together, what do you usually do? What do you talk about? How do you feel? How much time do you spend talking or doing something (volunteering, studying, listening to music, seeing a movie), and how much time is spent being physical or intimate? How comfortable are you with the balance between these types of activities?

Now, think about what it's like to have a conversation with your guy. Who does most of the talking? What happens if you say something? Does he listen and ask questions or interrupt, finish your sentences, or put down your opinions? Are you able to share your viewpoints with him or have you shied away from doing so?

It might also help to spend some time thinking about why your guy makes you feel a bit
intimidated. You say he doesn't brag or make you feel unintelligent, and that you know inside that you're not. You also say that you know he cares about you a lot. Could there be, or have there been, other experiences in your life that may be causing you to doubt yourself? So often, insecurities have much more to do with how we see ourselves (due to childhood patterns, cultural messages, personality, and current situations) than with how people are actually acting toward us. Talking with your friends and family might help you identify, and see examples of, your wonderful, unique qualities. After thinking about these issues, it might help to talk with your guy about how you've been feeling. Also, give him an opportunity to share his views.

Couples share and do some things together, while other time is spent alone or with other friends and family members. If you come to the conclusion that you can't be a part of your guy's intellectual side, you'll have to decide if this is okay with you or not. You may conclude that you want to be with someone with whom you'll always feel comfortable bantering. On the other hand, you may begin to see this as an opportunity for each of you to teach and learn from one another.

If your guy makes it plain that he likes you a lot ? by listening when you're talking, respecting your beliefs, and encouraging you to do things you enjoy, then it may be that he finds you a refreshing complement. In that case, his intellect is something for you to become familiar with and grow to enjoy, if you choose. Sometimes you might feel like being a brainiac yourself. Other times you might feel like just listening. Either way, also make sure to remember the other things you contribute to your dynamic duo that your guy may value in you: a caring ear, fancy dance moves, a vast knowledge of the hippest music, or the other parts of yourself that make you, and subsequently your relationship, special.

Alice!
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