Dear Alice,

I am a grad student in a two-year master's program in New York City who is suffering from great amounts of love-sickness. My boyfriend of three years is continuing work on his master's at our undergrad institution on the west coast. We talk over email and on the phone, and will see each other spring break, but it's so hard!!! I don't suppose you'd have any suggestions for helping pass away the time? Once the semester gets moving and I have work it's easier, but now, having just left his arms, I am missing him like crazy.

It's worse at night, when I'm used to having him next to me. I know the time will go fast, and soon we will be together again, but I'm worried because the potential to sit and brood about how much I miss him is so high. I really love this guy and vice versa. We've talked about it. In fact, I wouldn't be writing you except for he's in class for the moment and I'm just sitting here trying to figure out what to do for this three day weekend.

? Sigh.

Answer

Dear Sigh,

Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but few talk about the loneliness that can follow. Luckily, the fact that you have been together for three years can lessen the element of doubt that may occur in some long distance relationships. Also, as you said, once you become busier as the semester progresses, it will most likely get easier to be apart. Although every relationship is different, many other couples feel that it can be more difficult at the beginning of a separation, but will ease up as the time passes. Also, it appears that you are in a completely new environment yourself. Keep in mind that adjusting to a new school, academic program, city, and social network is hard work and is most likely contributing to the sting you feel being separated from your guy.

One way to cheer yourself up may be to think about this period as a time to explore things you haven't had time or the inclination to do in the last three years. Often in a relationship, folks are so busy managing and working on being a couple that it's easy to forget what it's like to do things by and for yourself. Your curiosities, desires, and hobbies can often accidentally fall by the wayside or become neglected as you make a place for another person to be such a big
part of your life. Luckily, you live in New York City, which is filled with endless opportunities to fulfill those curiosities while simultaneously taking your mind off of missing him. You could try visiting a museum, seeing a movie or show that your boyfriend would not like, and making new friends as an individual rather than as part of a couple. Use your imagination?you might surprise yourself with some creative ideas and fun things to do. The more new things you do, the more you'll have to talk about and share with your boyfriend next time you see him.

As for late at night, this is a time that many people feel the loneliness or pain of missing someone. You may want to try establishing a nighttime routine (which, by the way, can help improve sleep) as that may ease the pain. The routine could involve your boyfriend?or not. There?s a certain comfort that comes from rituals. You can most certainly involve him, though. You could talk to him on the phone before you go to sleep, write a letter or email to him as your last activity of the day, or take time to reflect on the day in a journal. Looking at pictures of the two of you together or reading old emails, cards and letters every once in a while might also make you feel closer to him emotionally, even if he's still physically far, far away. Making sure the lines of communication stay open by talking frequently and always being honest with one another can also play a major role in bridging the distance.

You can make it through this period (there was life before your boyfriend, wasn't there?). Go easy on yourself, utilize the support of good friends, and treat yourself right. If you feel like you can't seem to cheer up anytime soon, you may want to set up an appointment with a mental health professional. They can help you figure out healthy ways to work through this difficult period. Good luck going the (long) distance!

Alice!
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