Husband limits my time with friends [1]

Dear Alice,

My husband gets mad at me if I want to spend time with a friend. He says I don't have enough time for him. If I do spend time with a friend, he complains that everyone else is more important than he is because if I have enough time to spend with them I must have it to spend with him. I am only asking for one night out a month. We work together and spend every night together — is this asking a lot? My husband has no social life outside of me. If I don't want to spend all my time with my husband, does this mean I don't love him? He thinks so. What should I do? Help!!!

— Starting to get claustrophobic

Answer

Dear Starting to get claustrophobic,

It may be difficult in any relationship to maintain a balance between spending time with your partner, with your friends, with your family, with your children (if you have them), and with yourself. From your inquiry, it seems as though you and your husband differ when it comes to how much time is vital to spend together. While it may get sticky trying to get your needs met without hurting your husband, there are a few possible solutions. If, however, he continues trying to isolate you from family and friends, it may be a sign of emotional abusive [2] behavior. You're not asking a lot in wanting to see your friends one night a month, and it certainly doesn't mean you don't love your husband! Keep on reading for some strategies for dealing with your relationship troubles.

There are a few ways you and your husband may choose to strengthen your relationship — through talking and listening, asking questions, or discussing scenarios — to understand each other’s perspectives. Before you start, how about reflecting on some questions about yourself and your partner: Why do you think your husband minds if you see a friend one time a month? Does he know your friends? Do you ever invite him to spend time with your friends? Does he have his own friends? Does he spend time with them? Could he be jealous of your other relationships? What opportunities does he have to make new or to maintain his current friendships? Do you think he understands why you would have a need to be with people other than him? What interests does he have outside of work? Has he pursued these since you've
been married? How uncomfortable is your husband about being without you or being alone for even one night? Taking some time to understand these questions may help you figure out how to best move forward.

If the responses to these questions indicate extreme jealousy of friends and time spent away, discouraging meeting up with friends or family, refusing to trust you, and demanding to know where you are every minute, it may be a sign of emotional abuse, which is a type of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. However, if your answers to the above questions don’t worry you, you may consider engaging your husband in a discussion about your respective needs. If you decide to speak to someone about the situation, remember that violence and abuse are never the fault of the person to whom they’re directed. Many abusive partners may seem to be perfect in the beginning of the relationship, but later show abusive behavior. Though every relationship is different, each type of abuse is serious. You may find it helpful to read Healthy versus unhealthy relationships [3] to learn more about dynamics in relationships that may contribute to it being healthy or not.

One way to start your discussion with your husband is to reassure him that he’s the person that you’ve chosen, and that you love him, for better or for worse. Then, you can put into your own words what you’re noticing about the relationship. This can include information about his behavior, complaining about your contact with your friends. You can then explain how this makes you feel and what you need from the relationship. You could explain that having interests and friends outside of your primary relationship may serve to complement your relationship. If he doesn't have friends outside of his relationship with you, he may not understand why those relationships are valuable to you or the kind of support they provide. He also may not realize the kind of support they could provide to him. Once you’ve explained what you’re noticing and how it makes you feel, you may want to take the opportunity to check in with your husband to see if he understands your concerns. Also let him know that you're willing to work through them together and to figure out how you can meet both of your needs.

If this discussion doesn’t help, you may consider seeking support from others, such as a friend, family member, or a mental health professional. You may want to seek guidance on your own in order to work through your feelings about the situation with your husband, or you may want to go together. Talking about your concerns together may offer you two a way to work with a caring, trained, experienced professional who will help you each identify, understand, negotiate, and reach your goals. You may want to read How to find a therapist [4] for more information on how to find a mental health professional that fits your needs. If you've taken these measures and you aren't finding any changes happening in your relationship, you may want to think about whether or not it's still meeting your needs, as you deserve to be in a relationship that meets those needs.

Change is possible and it sounds as though you’re willing to invest the time and energy to have the relationship you want. Here’s to hoping your husband feels the same way.

To your happiness!

Alice!

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