Partner doesn't like doggie position [1]

1) Dear Alice,

My partner says she does not care for the "doggie" position because it causes her pain. I, on the other hand like to experiment and want to try everything. I guess I want more than just vanilla and she says if vanilla is great, continue to go for it. I guess I'm trying to sort out facts first. First, I know that only about 8 percent of women engage in this position. I guess I want to try it occasionally because the position gives me sight sensory as well as feeling. Anyway, I tell her I'd do anything she wants, anything to satisfy her in exchange for having sex in this position. I guess it's an obsession which becomes more of an obsession when it is denied!

Back to what she says. First, is that the angle is painful. She says the position is against the normal "curve" of the penis as it would enter in missionary position. Now on to the emotional side. What happens is that she will eventually consent but then because I feel guilty I jackrabbit and I can't enjoy it! What can be done to stop the pain she says is there? Is some of it emotional?

— Barking up the wrong tree

2) Dear Alice,

I like to have sex 'doggy style' more often than I could at the moment because my wife complains that it is painful. Is that common?

doggy style

Answer

Dear Barking up the wrong tree and doggy style,

The pain your partners are experiencing could be due to a number of causes. Regardless of the percentage of people assigned female at birth who agree to have penetrative sex in the "doggie-style" position, as with all forms of sex, getting consent from your partner isn't only key, it's necessary. Not only that, it can open up opportunities to explore new positions while also ensuring comfort for all partners. Doggy style, while this position can be exciting and pleasurable for you, it's not uncommon for a partner who's assigned female at birth to experience pain and
discomfort. Barking up the wrong tree, it might also be worth exploring why you’re feeling guilty and why this position has become an obsession for you. Reflecting on what you and your partners want for your sex life, and how to respect each other’s choices, may provide some direction for how to move forward.

Since your partners have stated that this position is painful, it might help to first understand some potential causes of that pain. One possibility is that there isn’t enough lubrication. Have you tried using water-based lubricant, or are you open to spending a little more time on foreplay? You may also want to ask if your partner would like you to stimulate their clitoris during sex or if more foreplay would be helpful for increasing their pleasure during the act. It’s worth noting that it can take some time for arousal (and in turn, adequate lubrication) to occur. This position could also be painful because you’re hitting the cervix with your penis. Instead of “jackrabbiting,” consider starting slow to help get things warmed up. If those causes don’t seem likely, it could simply be that you and your partner don’t fit as well in that way. The shape and size of the pleasure parts in these penetrative scenarios (e.g., penises/dildos/sex toys and vaginas) may be better suited for other positions that bring pleasure to all parties involved.

Have you tried or suggested other positions that may be more comfortable for your partner? You might take this as an opportunity to think creatively about the positions that’ll provide the stimulation you’re interested in, while still finding a position that’s comfortable for them. There are also variations of the doggie position that might provide more comfort, one of which entails you entering from behind while lying down next to each other on your sides, instead of attempting it on your knees. Checking in throughout while trying new positions and styles is key; it’ll help you both learn a bit about what is or isn’t pleasurable. Additionally, it’s possible that even with these new strategies, your partner may still experience pain while in this type of position.

No matter what the cause of the pain or what position(s) you engage in, it’s critical that you and your partner both freely and willingly consent to every sexual activity. Barking up the wrong tree, you state that she “eventually consents” but a large component of consent is making space for partners to be honest and communicate about what they want to do and what they don’t want to do, including different positions and sex acts, and then listening to what they’ve said. It must be enthusiastic and without manipulation or pressure. Could your feelings of guilt be due to the fact that your partner hasn’t enthusiastically consented or hasn’t consented without feeling pressured? Consent means your partner says yes not only with their words, but also with their tone and body language. If your partner doesn’t enjoy the position, it’s okay and it’s their right. Just like you have your preferences for doggie style, it’s their right to have their dislikes and sexual boundaries respected, and it’s not okay to talk someone into or pressure them into a sexual position or activity that they don’t like or want to do. For more on consent, check out Intimate ways to ask partner to make love [2].

Another factor to consider is whether there’s something other than the physical that’s bothering them. Some people may feel as though the "doggie" position is something being done to them, as opposed to something in which they’re participating. It could also be that they feel distant from their partner when they’re not facing them. The only way to learn this is to ask and then listen to your partner’s response to see how they feel. If your partner feels this way, you could offer to touch their body or wrap your arms around them to increase feelings of intimacy.
If your partner finds no relief or enjoyment in any of these changes, then it might be time to take a break from doggie style. Not forcing an issue is critical in any healthy sexual relationship and can give you both the time to relax, explore your sexuality together in other ways, and potentially come back to the doggie position at another, less stressful moment. Keep in mind that it’s possible that this isn’t a position in which your partner can participate pain-free. If this is the case, you’ll need to determine how this position plays into your overall enjoyment of sex. Barking up the wrong tree, can you be in a relationship in which your partner doesn’t consent to this position? Are you able to enjoy other types of sexual pleasure with this partner without this position being an obsession? In what ways can you enjoy sex without this position? If this is a sticking point for you both, you may want to reflect on the potential impact on your relationship because it’s ultimately about what works for both of you.

Here’s to wishing you both a happy, fulfilled, and consensual sex life.

Alice!
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