Scared about partner's graduation

Dear Alice,

First, let me say that this is the first time, after two years of faithfully reading your on-line service as a student, that I have felt compelled to ask you for help.

Here is my dilemma: I've always been close to my platonic friends. With one I began to secretly want more from our strange, mutually-exclusive but non-romantic relationship. Well it happened! If it were not for the previous closeness we had developed, I would never have given myself to him so quickly. So, we are now approaching the inevitable arrival of his graduation date, and I am anxious about what will happen. I grew up with conservative, religious feelings and beliefs about sexual relationships, but I am also practical and intelligent. I realize for him to promise marriage would be premature, but I have this engrained desire to stay together no matter where he finds a job or what he decides to do after this May. I fear, however, that although our relationship is far from temporary, that he is frightened of committing to a long term and possibly long distance relationship at 22. I know he loves me, and our relationship in most respects is ideal. But how do I reconcile all of these facts?

Scared in love

Answer

Dear Scared in love,

It's great that you've found someone with whom you have a strong connection. Ultimately, when it comes to determining what his plans are and what he's thinking, the only way to know for sure is to ask him about his post-graduation plans and what he sees for your relationship. You seem to know how you'd like to move forward after his graduation, so learning more about his thoughts and plans may help to quell your anxiety.

Long distance relationships, if both people invest in them with tools such as phone calls, video chatting, texting, e-mail, letters, and occasional visits, can totally work. The challenge of long distance may even strengthen your relationship in the long run, or free up some of your personal time to focus on activities that are meaningful to you. It will take some work, but there are plenty of examples of successful relationships that have endured a period of distance. In life and in love,
however, there are no guarantees. You may find that a long distance relationship makes one or both of you unhappy, or that distance causes you grow apart in ways that are ultimately bittersweet but perhaps healthy for you both. All of the above can apply to romantic relationships as well as close friendships.

You seem to have a lot of thoughts and feelings to sort out. Have you talked with your partner about your feelings and concerns about the relationship as his graduation approaches? Has he indicated whether he'd be interested in this relationship long-term? How about making some notes about how you would like the conversation to go before talking with him? Has he brought the subject up with you? If you decide to have a conversation, or the first of several, be sure to plan a time when you can both be fully present and not rushed. Key life decisions deserve time to be discussed.

Now, in preparation you may want to give yourself the opportunity to talk about these and other feelings in a safe, unbiased way first. A trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional may fill that need. It may take some courage to go talk about your feelings and concerns with another person; however, you may find that the benefits, including developing some insight and a sense of personal power within your relationship, are worth it. You can also check out some other long distance questions from readers, such as Long distance relationships: Giving it a go! and Relationship becomes a long distance one.

You aren't alone in concerns about relationships after graduation. Times of transition are often filled with anxiety and potentially conflicting feelings. Congrats again for having a solid relationship and for getting started on this thought process.

Alice!
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Resources

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