Dear Alice,

My new live-in boyfriend can't go to sleep without a TV on. I need a quiet dark room to go to sleep. He wants to sleep with me but he can't. He ends up getting up and falling asleep on the couch in front of the TV. How long will it take him to adjust to sleeping without the TV?

Answer

Dear Reader,

People in relationships are often keenly aware of their partner’s sleep habits; whether it be getting kicked awake mid-dream or getting little sleep due to loud snoring. Being able to comfortably share a bed with a partner may take time and doesn't work for all couples. Unfortunately, there’s no set schedule for how long it takes a person to learn to sleep in a new environment. The good news is that there are a few options that may help you both get a night full of Zzzs.

First, you might be interested to know that watching television or using the computer, especially in the bedroom, can hinder overall quality of sleep. The light that the TV gives off, called blue light, has been shown to suppress melatonin — a hormone released by the body’s pineal gland — making it more difficult for folks to fall asleep. Therefore, both the light and the noise could be impacting the quality of sleep your partner is getting. So, while you’re the one asking about how to get some quality shut-eye, your boyfriend might want to know about this as well.

If you’re hoping to improve your sleep quality, you might start with working together to identify why your significant other needs the TV to fall asleep. Is it the actual program he watches? Is it just background noise? Is the TV being used to help his mind drift so he's not kept awake by thoughts of school, work, or other responsibilities? Is it just an old habit? Once you determine the reason(s) why your partner prefers to snooze with the TV on, you can work together to find possible alternatives and solutions that might put you back in the same bed again.

If it's the noise that your partner needs in order to drift off into dreamland, you may consider using a personal audio device with headphones instead of watching TV. He might consider listening to audio books or perhaps a guided meditation. Research shows that meditation is an effective
strategy for managing stress — which could be helpful if his mind is racing at night. If the sounds of a late night nature documentary help block out other disruptive noises for your partner, perhaps he might be open to switching out the screen for a white noise machine, fan, or air conditioner. Would you be open to adding some white noise to your bedroom, such as a fan, air conditioner, or white noise machine? Perhaps that could help your partner fall asleep without interrupting your sleep. Additionally, you could try using ear plugs and an eye mask to help address your need for dark and quiet sleep spaces. If you’re still having trouble finding sleep solutions that meet your needs, you may find it helpful to meet with a health promotion specialist to discuss them further.

If none of these strategies don’t end up resulting in a suitable co-sleeping arrangement, you may consider continuing to sleep separately. You may find it helpful to know that sleeping separately is common, even among couples who’ve been together for decades. If you want to share intimate moments prior to falling asleep, consider cuddling while you talk or watch a movie, and when it’s bedtime, you sleep in separate places. At the end of the day, the right strategy is whichever one helps you both get the rest you need.

All the best in finding the right balance that supports both of you in bed.

Alice!
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