

In love with my best friend, but he's gay ^[1]

Dear Alice,

My best buddy is a gay male. I am a straight female. We get along so well, soul mates, so to speak. My problem is that I truly believe I am in love with him. I miss him terribly when we are apart and am very turned on by him. I can't explain it. Do I keep on as is because I can't risk losing him or do I try to see if he has bisexual interests?

Answer

Dear Alice,

Relationships — romantic or otherwise — can feel like that new song on the radio: sometimes they may seem confusing and unclear, and at other times, they may seem harmonious and with a catchy, toe-tapping rhythm on the first listen. Any time there is a lack of clarity around a relationship or the intentions of those who are in it, the experience of being in that relationship can be stressful and uncertain. When it comes to the question you have posed, as unhelpful as this may seem, you're the only one who can know and make the decisions that are right for you. With that said, it can also be helpful to consider what you value in your relationships that matter most, while also further examining your current thoughts and their future implications.

One question you might consider is what you value most about your current relationship with this friend. What are the values and qualities that make this relationship feel so special and like this friend is your "soul mate?" It may be helpful to write a list of the values within your relationship that are most salient to you in order to gain clarity about what you have now. Once you have a clearer picture of what you value most about this relationship, you might consider examining which of the values in your list that are also satisfied in other relationships. You might write out additional lists for yourself to see where and how those values are being expressed elsewhere, if they do exist and are being expressed in other relationships in your life. Examining what you value most about your relationship and where else you're fulfilling similar values can help you gain a more comprehensive picture of what exactly this relationship means to you. This can also be helpful as you consider the level of risk to this relationship that feels tolerable to you.

From a comprehensive understanding of what this relationship means to you in the context of your life, you might then engage in a cost-benefit analysis of sorts. First, what do you have to

gain by communicating your feelings to your friend and exploring the potential for shifting your relationship to a romantic one? And with any decision, no matter how positive and beneficial it may be, there is always a cost. So in thinking about having this conversation with your friend, you might also ask yourself: at what cost would having the conversation come?

While there is no right or wrong answer, hopefully the brainstorming and mapping out of thoughts, values, and relationships can help you as you engage in this process. It may feel difficult, or it may feel really clear and easy once you have started giving yourself space and permission to engage in this type of critical thought. Ensuring that you have at least one good night's sleep before you make any definitive decision can also help give you the space and mental capacity to feel confident with whatever decision you make.

If you do decide that what you stand to gain from a conversation expressing your feelings is worth the costs that it may come at, you might then start to consider how you want to have this conversation and what you want it to look like. For conversations that feel particularly difficult, it can be beneficial to plan for a conversation takes place in a private space at a pre-determined time so you have a place to be comfortable and that can you can talk without distractions. You don't need to tell your friend what you want to talk about specifically, but letting them know that you'd like to talk about a topic that feels like a big deal to you can help them prepare to be in that space with you, rather than feeling shocked and caught off guard by an unplanned, surprise conversation.

And last, as you consider what you'd like to do and how you want to do it, it can be helpful to recognize that this situation with your friend doesn't need to fulfill one of the two outcomes you named. It's possible that you have the conversation and express your feelings, and that they're not reciprocated, but that articulating them doesn't change your current relationship. Your feelings could also be reciprocated, and you may try having a romantic relationship, but then decide to go back to your friendship. As in any relationship, feelings can exist on a continuum, and the decisions to act on them can be a collaborative product of conversation and consideration of outcomes together.

Good luck,

Alice!

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