

I love my boyfriend, but I don't want to have sex anymore ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am 20 years old and recently lost my virginity to my boyfriend of six months. Before this happened, I strongly believed that I would wait until marriage because of both personal and religious reasons. My boyfriend completely understood my morals but then pushed the limits after only one month together and I didn't stop him. Not to mention we had sex before we told each other, "I love you." I regretted my decision the moment it happened. I know (now) that he loves me and I love him, but I still believe that what we are doing is wrong. I hate lying and that is exactly what I am doing by being dishonest with my family and peers. He acts so hurt when we do not have sex but I don't want to anymore. How can I tell him that I want to put an end to our sexual relationship?

Sincerely,
Ashamed

Answer

Dear Ashamed,

Conversations about sex can be tricky and tricky conversations with people you care about can feel daunting. Sometimes, however, those are the most important conversations to have. Additionally, there is no need to feel ashamed. You are clearly in touch with your thoughts and feelings; a moment to feel pride rather than shame.

It sounds like you've been thinking a lot about your decision to have sex. Some people feel that once they've started to have sex that they have to continue. In fact, people can and do decide to stop having sex for all sorts of reasons. You are allowed to change your mind and you are allowed to define and redefine your sexual boundaries as your feelings evolve or change over time.

Talking openly and honestly with your boyfriend about how you are feeling and what you do and don't want sexually is an important next step. Here are some ways to help get that conversation

started:

- **Consider your wants and whys.** Why is not having sex important to you now and how do you want to share those reasons with your boyfriend? What do you want in your physical and non-physical relationship with him? Why did it feel necessary to lie to your peers and family about your relationship and how do you want to change that moving forward? You may want to write these down for future reference or to have with you during the conversation.
- **Choose and time and place.** Sometimes it can be tempting to put off difficult conversations. But often delaying a tough talk only increases anxiety. There is never a “perfect time”, but try to pick a time, sooner rather than later, that can be uninterrupted for both of you. Consider choosing a place that is neutral — where you can both feel safe to speak openly and honestly. Avoiding places that may feel conflicting, like the bedroom, may make you feel more comfortable when talking about an intimate subject.
- **Speak and listen with compassion and openness.** Try to make sure that both you and your boyfriend have the chance to share what you’re feeling and thinking when you talk. Good conversations are like well-planned traffic — there is movement in both directions, with appropriate pauses and consideration of the others. Let him know your wants and whys — try to give him context for what has shifted or changed since you first had sex. Also, sharing both your concerns and also things that you appreciate in your relationship will bring some balance to the discussion. Try avoiding assumptions about what your boyfriend is thinking or feeling. It may also prove helpful to speak from your own experience, using “I-statements”, and allow him to share his views and input.
- **Discuss what’s next.** After you and your boyfriend both have a chance to share your opinions, consider discussing what you both want for next steps. Are you in agreement with changing the dynamic of your physical relationship? Try to be as clear about expectations and boundaries as possible. What do you each want and not want? How can you negotiate those desires if they change as you move forward? There are lots of ways to be physical, intimate, and romantic — sex and sexuality are up for creative interpretation and exploration. When you both feel understood and are on the same page, it can help keep your relationship trusting and happy.

You are navigating quite a few relationships. First, you are dealing your relationship with yourself, who you want to be, and what you want to be doing; second, your relationship with your boyfriend; and third, your relationships with your family and peers. Since sex can be sometimes confusing and hard to talk about, you may want to think about talking with a trusted friend, a therapist, or an advisor about your feelings before or after you talk to your boyfriend. It takes courage to reach out and ask for help with tough topics — you are not alone and can continue to seek support of those around you.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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