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,

Many people in relationships can say they are 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 can take time and may not work for all couples. Unfortunately, there’s no set schedule for how long it can take a person to learn to sleep in a new environment. The good news is that there are few options you can consider to help you both get a night full of z’s.

First, you might be interested to know that the National Sleep Foundation[2] reports that watching television or using the computer within an hour of going to bed, especially in the bedroom, can hinder overall quality of sleep. Also, the light that the TV gives off, called blue light, has been shown to suppress melatonin[3] — 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. So, what can the two of you do?

You might start with working together to identify why needing the TV to fall asleep is important to your significant other. Is it the actual program your partner watches? Is it just background noise? Is the TV being used to help your partner’s mind drift so they’re 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 on finding possible 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, consider using a personal audio device with headphones instead of watching TV. He might consider listening to
audio books or perhaps a guided meditation. Meditation has been proven to help manage stress — which could be helpful if his mind is racing at night. Another option might include having your boyfriend use wireless headphones connected to a radio, television, or other source at night. Or, 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 sheep counting. Additionally, you could try using ear plugs and an eye mask to help address your need for dark and quiet sleep spaces.

If these strategies don’t provide suitable co-sleeping solutions, there’s no need to feel embarrassed. Sleeping separately is common, even among couples who have 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. All in all, 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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