

Friends... Add benefits? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have a good guy friend, and we were talking about friends with benefits. We said how sometimes you want the relationship, but then sometimes not. Then we were talking about how if you want just the perks without the ties, then why not with someone you know and trust. I asked him if he was looking at someone in particular, and he said no, and he asked me and I said not really. The dilemma is that I want to go that step with him. I want to become friends with benefits. But I'm afraid that if I talk to him about it, he'll freak out and reject the idea and I'll lose a friend. I don't know if he would really react that way, but I'm just afraid. We both seem to be looking for the same things and I've been feeling like this for a while now... Should I talk to him about it or just forget about it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

An old Nigerian proverb goes, "Hold a true friend with both your hands," although, in your case, it sounds like you're looking to do a little more than holding.

For the uninitiated, "friends with benefits" is a term to describe friends/acquaintances who hook up. "Hooking up" is a convenient way to describe the activities since it wipes away the 1st base/2nd base clarity and covers all variety of sexual encounters. The friends involved might be bosom buddies or only minor acquaintances; they might be an ex-couple still enjoying the benefits of their now-ended relationship, or a pair who'd never met before deciding to set up to hook up. How things begin often determines how things proceed: whether it's a one-time event, a frequently recurring appointment, or anything in between.

There are many reasons someone may elect to have a "friends with benefits" arrangement. Lack of time for an emotionally-committed relationship and lack of interest were often cited as reasons for choosing the more no-strings-attached feel that friends with benefits carries. Also, unlike casual sex or the bar scene, for instance, friends with benefits can give both parties a little more security and comfort than an anonymous, one-night stand might.

Before you start worrying about whether a friends with benefits relationship is good for your

friend, it's important that you take time to figure out if it's good for you. Do you want more from the relationship than just the benefits? One of the hardest parts about making a friends with benefits situation work is that, in time, one person can become more emotionally committed than the other. Going into it with the expectation of a future relationship can be even worse, since you're on uneven ground from the start. Also, will this be the first sexual relationship you've ever had? Or even the first relationship? Sometimes it's hard to separate love from lust — something which a friends with benefits relationship demands — especially if it is the first time you experience both.

So then to the matter of whether or not to tell your guy. Yes, your friendship might be strained if you ask him about it. On the other hand, not telling him might do just the same, or may cause you to miss out on an opportunity to explore this other kind of friendship.

Consider further what happens if all things go well: you tell him, he agrees, and you add the benefits package to your existing friendship. When all is said and done, will you be able to continue to be friends without complication? Will he? And if the two of you are part of a larger circle of friends, are you comfortable with their reactions if they find out? If things were too strained by this additional feature, could you handle the loss of this friend for the promise of a sexual partner? Of course no one knows for sure, but it makes sense to mentally play out all of the possible scenarios before you make a decision, so that you will be more prepared for the possible outcomes of whatever choice you make.

And finally, if you do choose to explore this much-trodden field, don't forget all the other responsibilities associated with beginning a sexual relationship. Unlike full-on relationships, agreements between friends can often be non-exclusive. Remember that you can't consider only your partner's sexual status. And if your partnership is a potentially procreative one, contraceptive options such as the pill, patch, or shot may decrease the chances of adding a third to your friends with benefits relationship, while trusty condoms can do this and more by protecting against most STIs.

Alice!

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