In love, but not in lust [1]

Dear Alice,

I have been going out with my boyfriend for nearly four years and we are both approaching the engagement decision. We get along great and never lose the ability to have fun and laugh together. The only problem is that while he wants to engage in intimate activities often (we are still both virgins), I am not that interested. I love him, but I still don't get physically turned on with him as I do while fantasizing about other guys. Is it wrong to marry someone whom you don't feel a total "romance novel" passion for?

— In love, but not in lust

Answer

Dear In love, but not in lust,

People tie the knot for a variety of reasons, so there’s no single "right" reason to get married. It's common to have feelings of doubt as a relationship matures and the level of commitment increases. From what you've described, it sounds as if you and your partner have a fun and compatible relationship dynamic. You've been together for four years, so it's likely that you know by now if you're well-suited in terms of interests, values, energy levels, lifestyles, temperaments, and personalities. Even so, it may be helpful to think through some reflective relationship questions as you both move forward and determine what might make sense for your relationship.

First, there may be multiple reasons why you feel that the "spark" in your relationship is lacking. It's helpful to keep in mind that maintaining a passion for each other requires intentional effort and communication, and the nature of your attraction to each other may change over the years. To start addressing your concerns about the physical component of your relationship, consider the following questions:

- Were you initially physically and sexually attracted to your partner? If so, how and why did that attraction wane over time?
- What do you enjoy about the current sexual activities in which you engage? Is there anything you'd like to change?
- Do you and your partner have different libidos, sex drive, or different expectations for the
frequency of sexual activity?
- What's different between your partner and the people about which you fantasize?
- If nothing changed about your shared sex life, do you feel you would continue to be satisfied with your overall relationship?

In addition to the physical component of your relationship, it might also be beneficial to examine how your relationship contributes to your own personal growth and development as the commitment level deepens. Some example questions include:

- Does this relationship enhance or diminish who I am?
- Do we share the same levels of respect, admiration, and support for each other?
- Are we in the same phase of our lives or headed toward the same end goals?

When happily married couples have been asked to describe their relationships, it's typically not love or sex that they mention. Rather, it tends to be companionship and respect. Try weighing the qualities and characteristics of your ideal relationship into three categories: those that are essential, that are reasonably significant, and that are luxuries. Also, keep in mind that your preferred balance between compatibility, sexual attraction, and commitment may change over time. Once you get a better sense of your relationship values and priorities, it may help you see the path forward more clearly.

When the time for commitment draws near, many people's fears begin to surface and demand attention. Have you told your partner about your feelings? He might appreciate your honesty. Consider sharing how you feel and what that means for the future of your relationship. You might also try answering the above questions together. It may be helpful to talk with someone you trust in your life such as a friend, family member, or mental health professional for further insight. You might also consider checking out the Go Ask Alice! Relationships [2] archives for more helpful information about how to start difficult discussions, relationship boosters, and more.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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