Loving confusion — Is it okay to love same sex friends... and say so? [1]

Alice,

What is the difference between "I like you" and "I love you"?

I mean, when I say, "I like you," to my male friends, and when I said, "I love you," to my girlfriend and my family. In my opinion, I'm not supposed to say, "I love you," to my best male friend because of homosexuality. Is it true?

Mr. Doubtful

Answer

Dear Mr. Doubtful,

There's no doubt that "like" and "love" have different meanings for different people. There's no one answer, no right or wrong interpretation of what it means to express these feelings — whether that's to a platonic friend or a romantic soulmate. Often, people say that love is a stronger emotion than like, but the distinction may end there. If you're worried about how your friend may react, it may be good to have a one-on-one conversation with him and consider what about him and the relationship you appreciate, as a way to share your love.

Whether it's "like" or "love" you feel about someone, there are a number of conditions, experiences, and reasons that may have you feeling either way, including:

- They're fun to be around.
- They're great to talk with about what's on your mind; they listen and give good advice.
- They're warm, friendly, and nice to other people.
- The two of you have a lot in common.
- They respect your privacy.
- They make you feel good about yourself.
- They've taken the time to get to know you and involve you in their life.
- And an infinite number of other reasons!
Notice these reasons you may like or love someone doesn’t include anything about having romantic feelings for, wanting to have sex with, or wanting to spend the rest of your life with the person you like or love. That’s because “like” and “love” don’t necessarily require these emotions. Moving on to your question about homosexuality: a person’s sexual orientation is just that — it describes who they’re attracted to (sexually, but also potentially romantically or emotionally) in terms of gender. This is a preference that individuals determine for themselves and isn’t determined by verbally expressing appreciation for someone.

You mentioned that it's okay to feel and voice love for your family and not just because you're "supposed" to love them (including same-sex family members). Is it possible your friends could fall into this same category — especially the ones who are there for you just like family? If you’re hesitant to tell a friend how much you love them, try asking yourself what your true feelings are and what you’re anticipating. That may be the root of your question: how will your friend in question respond? Will he reciprocate or feel uncomfortable? You may not be able to predict or control his response, but you may learn a lot about him and your friendship from his reaction. If you think that expressing your feelings to your friend might be uncomfortable for either of you, consider talking in a distraction-free zone, in private, when you're both feeling relaxed. If it’s more comfortable, you might consider framing the conversation in a way that highlights the different ways you value the relationship and them as a person.

Whether you want to tell someone you like or love them, it’s worth noting that small acts of kindness and appreciation go a long way in making people feel special. When you hand out thoughtful compliments and express how much you care about your friends, family, and significant others, you’re giving your relationships a fantastic boost!

Alice!

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