Dear Alice,

I haven't been in many relationships but when I do meet someone I tend to end it quickly. As soon as the relationship nears any possibility of becoming sexual with each other, I bail. I feel this is due to my lack of experience. I just can't get past the kissing. Sometimes I don't even let it get that far. What can I do to prevent this from happening in my next relationship?

Just need to know

Answer

Dear Just need to know,

It’s natural to feel anxious or uncomfortable about being physically intimate with someone new. There’s no timeline for when a relationship typically becomes sexual and what’s more, not every relationship needs to become sexual. It might be worth giving yourself a break to explore what you’re hoping for in and with a partner and the reasons for your actions. Taking some time off now can help you regroup, whether on your own or with the help of a trusted family member, friend, or professional, in the hopes of having the type of relationship you’re looking for in the future.

As you reflect on your past relationships and your reasons for leaving, you may consider these questions:

- What does sexual intimacy mean to you?
- What would make you feel comfortable or ready to be sexually intimate with your partner?
- Have you wanted to engage in sexual activity while in previous relationships?

These questions may be able to help you understand how you feel about sexual intimacy and activity and how it can fit into your relationships, helping you figure out what you really want for yourself, not what you think others want from you.

If the possibility of sexual activity is keeping you from pursuing a meaningful relationship, why not take it off the table and just spend time getting to know one another? That way you’re able to feel...
more comfortable seeing where it goes — who knows, maybe you'll feel the relationship move in a sexual direction naturally without as much pressure and effort as you may have felt in the past. Have you considered telling your partner how you feel? Of course, sharing your true feelings may be difficult — being vulnerable about your past reluctance and concerns can be challenging when you're not sure how the other person will respond. You might try framing the conversation around wanting to get to know them well before allowing the physical aspect of the relationship to bloom. Not only can this reduce your anxiety, but it helps open those crucial lines of communication. If this is someone with whom you might eventually want to be physically intimate, becoming emotionally intimate first may ease some of your worries. Sharing your needs and feelings from the beginning will also help you weed out potential partners who aren't ready to be sensitive and supportive of your feelings.

If none of this seems to help, perhaps there are more complex issues underneath the surface that have affected your ability to be as intimate as you'd like. Talking with a mental health professional may help you identify the underlying reasons for your feelings, actions, and behavior, and can help get you closer to what you want.

Best of luck in future relationships!

Alice!

Category:
- Relationships [2]
- Relating & Communicating [3]
- Miscellaneous [4]

Related questions

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Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [8]
- Mental Health Services (CUIMC) [9]

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