

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**I love my boyfriend and he says he loves me but he likes to spend time with his guy friends a few evenings a week and says he needs “space” sometimes. When I’m not with him, I find myself becoming angry and just waiting for his call. I’m feeling like a love-struck teenager but I’m in my thirties!**

- Janie P.

Dear Janie,

Different people have different needs for solitude and for balancing other aspects of their lives (e.g., spending time with their significant other and spending time with friends).

All of us have to make decisions about how much closeness and how much independence we need in our primary relationships. This is a critical understanding that must be established in any relationship if we are to avoid feelings of disappointment or, on the other hand, feelings of being pressured to be everything to our partner.

Love doesn’t mean becoming attached at the hip to your boyfriend. In fact, relationships are more vibrant, rich, and satisfying when they are between two whole human beings with a desire to share their lives together. This means being together because they *want* to be, and not because they *need* to be.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer gave us a parable -- a great visual image -- to think about regarding this issue. He asked us to consider a group of porcupines on a cold winter day. The challenge of these little animals, he said, was to find the right amount of closeness that would allow them to keep from being frozen (the pleasure of mutual warmth), but not so much as to be painful (hey! enough already with those sharp quills!).

Schopenhauer gives us a good starting place, but human beings are not porcupines. So my suggestion to you, Janie, is to really think about this relationship and how you and your boyfriend are alike and/or different in the amount of time you want to spend together. What are your expectations for the relationship? What are his?

These are important questions that deserve a deep, conscious conversation between the two of you. You may find that when you both have a clearer understanding of what to expect from each other, some of your feelings of anger may dissipate.

Your letter notes that your boyfriend wants to spend “a few evenings a week” with his buddies. This doesn’t strike me as an excessive amount of time away from you (my thoughts would be different if he wanted to spend “most” evenings with his friends or that he never spent time with you). Closeness and independence are always matters of degree.

Have you built your whole life around this man? If so, that is unfair to both of you. It keeps you from doing other things with your life, and it deprives him of the opportunity to have friends and/or activities apart from you.

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While our primary relationships are understandably very important parts of our lives, they cannot be all of it. What are your other interests? Who are your friends?

Remember that being alone doesn't have to mean being lonely. I suggest that you have a heart-to-heart talk with your boyfriend about both of your expectations. Then instead of waiting by the phone, get a life!

Let your own creative imagination soar. Take a class. Volunteer to do something good for the community. Join a bowling team, or chess club, or book discussion group. Spend some time with your own friends. Look into your own heart to discover your own interests and find the balance that will allow you to develop and grow as a person *as well as* a partner in this relationship.

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke wrote about the best way to live our love. He wrote, "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch, and salute each other."

Find ways of doing that and you will be a lot happier in this relationship.

*Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direction questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949*

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