

Ask Connie... “Just Friends??”

Dear Connie,

My boyfriend Paul and I have been together for four years. A few months ago, he began hanging out with another woman—stopping by her house on the way home from work, calling her several times a week, hiking and climbing with her. I’m never included in these get-togethers; in fact, he refuses to introduce me to her! When I told him how bothered I was by this, he accused me of being jealous and insecure, and said they’re just friends. Now, he says he doesn’t see her anymore, but I know he does—people have seen them together. I’m confused and frustrated by his lack of honesty, and I suspect he’s having an emotional affair. What should I do?

—Sandy

Connie Myslik-McFadden,

MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads work-

shops, retreats and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of *Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing*.

Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (Gettingthe loveyouwant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.



Dear Sandy,

At the heart of what you’re describing I hear the questions: Can I trust him? Are they really just friends? Am I just jealous and insecure? If I weren’t, would it be o.k. for him to be hanging out with another woman? And the unspoken question, what does his behavior say about our relationship?

First, the “just friends” issue. Men and women seem to see this differently. Men often see spending time with another woman, even emotionally intimate time, as innocent. As long as they aren’t sexually intimate, men think they’re being faithful. Women, on the other hand, are often as threatened by an emotional affair as by a sexual one. Sometimes more so. Men only have so much emotional energy to go around, they reason. Thus they fear that emotional intimacy with another will mean not much left over for them. The ultimate fear is fear of abandonment.

This is not to say that men and women cannot or should not have friends outside of their relationship. It’s certainly possible for people to have friendships with either sex that don’t threaten their primary relationship. What is required is that the friendship not interfere with or drain energy from the primary relationship, that there be honesty with one’s partner regarding the friendship, and that appropriate boundaries be maintained.

In the situation you’re describing, there are several red flags. One is that he has neither introduced you to her nor included you in their get-togethers. Something is going on between them that he doesn’t want you to know about,



let alone be a part of. Another is that he is apparently lying to you about whether they’re even in contact. So of course you don’t trust him - why should you? If he can’t tell you the truth, your relationship is in serious trouble.

Is it OK for him to be hanging out with another woman? That’s up to you. You have the right to decide what is acceptable and what is not acceptable within the context of the relationship. Was the relationship exclusive before he began spending time with the other woman? If so, it looks like he has decided that is no longer the case. Has your relationship been moving toward greater commitment, such as living together, getting engaged or married? Usually after four years people in a relationship are planning a future together; if not, there are probably issues that are in the way that need to be talked about and resolved ... or not. It’s possible your boyfriend is not able to tell you directly that he wants to move on, so he’s doing it indirectly. You may be jealous, and you may feel insecure, but those are normal feelings when a relationship that matters is being threatened. Don’t let him tell you

how you should or shouldn't feel.
Trust your intuition.

If Paul really cared about your feelings, even if his friendship were innocent, he would be sensitive to the distress this is causing you. Instead, he's demonstrating a colossal lack of consideration. And so is his female friend. Is she aware you and Paul have been in a committed relationship? If so, why is she spending a lot of time with him? Something isn't right. Perhaps Paul has minimized your relationship or told her it's just about over. Sadly, many relationships end this way—one partner secretly starts a new relationship before resolving the old one.

If you want to continue your relationship with Paul, this issue must be resolved. It's time to have a heart-to-heart conversation. Ask him to tell you honestly how he feels about you, and what he really wants. Find out what is difficult for him in your relationship, and what it is he's been getting from the other woman that he hasn't gotten with you. Tell him you care enough to work on the relationship and make some changes together, with help if necessary. And—very important—let him know that if he wants to be with you, he needs to end his relationship with the other woman. If he cannot accept that, you have your answer. Good luck, Sandy! —Connie

Do you have a relationship question?

Write to Connie at
conniem@mcn.net or

Call 406-582-7450 —and ask!

E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published. Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.

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