

Get With The Program

Q: I've been seeing this guy for a while. He's a really nice, really sexy guy, and I dig him. We met at a dinner party, where friends introduced us, and from there we've been spending a lot of one-on-one time, like hiking and, um, stuff. I took him out to dinner the other night and, when I asked him to pick out a bottle of wine for us, was surprised to find out that he doesn't drink, because he's a recovering alcoholic. I know people who don't drink, but we don't really talk about it, and I've never dated someone who doesn't drink at all. I'm not a big drinker, but the idea that we'll never share a bottle of wine makes me a little sad. Also, I don't want to offend him by drinking in front of him, or having a party where I'm serving alcohol. He's a really great, engaging guy. I'm not sure how to move forward.

A: Alcohol is part of gay culture. I'm sorry to say it, but it's true. Hell, it's part of American culture. A lot of queers are wounded kids who are still covering up hurt with alcohol (or drugs or food or something). If it's awkward for you that he's not drinking, imagine how awkward it is for him. Be proud of your partner for facing his demons. It's the reason he can be a present and full participant in your relationship. It's probably



ask a gay

BY KRISTIN FLICKINGER

a big part of why you find him so fun and engaging.

If it really, truly matters to you that you will never share a bottle of wine with this guy, then, honey, it's not going to work—for either of you. But if you can get over that, and work through the social awkwardness that you're feeling, you could find yourself in an emotionally and spiritually fulfilling relationship like you've never experienced.

Frankly, it's where I find myself now. I'm in a relationship with a woman who is in recovery. I don't drink. I never did. I'm not part of the program, but I still face the pressures we all do to have a drink in your hand at a party. So, for me, dating someone who is sober is a wonderful thing. It's an added bonus to the smart, sexy package she brings. The fact that she doesn't drink takes away some of the anxiety that I feel in social situations where I'm expected to be imbibing.

But it's more than that—much more. A person who is in recovery isn't just someone who doesn't drink. Sobriety is a part of every facet of their life. I find that my girlfriend is dedicated to honest, open communication

and takes responsibility for her behavior. She is deliberate in her thoughts and actions in a way that is really rare. She is dedicated to these things because she is a fantastic person, and also because they are important aspects of her recovery. Being in a relationship with someone like that inspires me to embrace those ideals with her.

Dating a person in recovery means dating someone who is, first and foremost, truly dedicated to a spiritual relationship with their higher power. It means dating someone who is committed to helping others and being of service in their daily lives. It can mean phone calls and meetings on a daily basis.

My girlfriend meditates and makes and takes calls every single day. For me, it means that the mornings are hers, a kind of no-fly zone that I respect so that she can do her spiritual work. I am blessed to be able to witness my partner honoring herself every time she meditates or prays. I am inspired to find my own sacred, personal time. And I see her reaching out to a beautiful support structure of like-minded people who hold her accountable, and connect her to a community. I see

her providing support to others in recovery as they find themselves in dark times. It reminds me to show compassion to my fellow human beings.

Everything that she does to support her recovery strengthens her, and it strengthens our relationship, because she is fully able to engage from a place of conscious, deliberate action. It is one of the most beautiful things I have ever experienced.

So, my dear, if you like this guy, try to put aside your awkwardness, and experience the beauty he may have to offer you. If you have questions, ask. If you're wondering how he feels at a party where your friends are all drinking, ask him. If you want to know how to support him, ask. Let him know that you're willing to support him if you can.

If you would like to know more about the program, think about attending an Al-Anon meeting (for friends and family of alcoholics), or a CoDA meeting (for people seeking healthy relationships). These meetings will introduce you to the idea of 12-step programs, and give you the tools to both better understand your partner and to make sure you are placing yourself and your spirituality first, too. ☐

KRISTIN FLICKINGER talks more about relationships, life and love at askthegay.com.

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