

Family Council

Mrs. R. E.—Gail should give Bert up.
Gail E. — We're miserable apart.

Mrs. R. E.—I am confused about how to help my 16-year-old daughter who has been going steady with a boy for the past two years.

I have been trying to get Gail to see other boys and once in a while she does date one, but then she comes back to Bert and won't go out again with the other fellow. I have nothing against Bert. He seems nice, but I feel he is a little young for her. The most important thing is that she doesn't seem happy with him. They constantly have fights and she cries and goes around in a black mood.

I feel she is spoiling years in which she could be having fun. Yet she refuses to give Bert up.

Gail E.—Bert and I really love each other and hope to marry some day. We know it can't be for a long time. We both want to go to college. We aren't the silly kind of teen agers. We often study together. We certainly don't want to break up.

I don't know why we get into these fights. Sometimes we just find ourselves fighting and we don't know what started it. We say we're never going to see one another again and then we both feel terrible. Often the fights start because of jealousy. He says if I can see others he can too and then we're both miserable.

I always have an awful time with other boys. So why give up Bert?

The Council: Perhaps it would help Gail to realize that it is hard for everyone, even those much older than she is, to give up the safety of the known for the dark, icy waters of the unknown.

Gail clings to Bert and he to her because they are used to one another, accept one another and offer one another no challenges. They were undoubtedly helpful to one another in their early growing up stages, but now the very security they find in one another is serving as a ball and chain.

This is why these teen agers are constantly fighting. Through the fights they express their irritation about being more or less handcuffed together and they also alleviate some of the boredom of their relationship. After a good fight they enjoy making up and feel refreshed for further association with one another.

This sort of relationship can go on for a long time, blocking both partners from further development. The determination Gail expresses to marry Bert "some day" is not based in deep feeling or rational thinking. She and her boy friend are using it as an additional weight on their ball and chain. It is just one more reason to keep them from doing what they want to do—get to know others.

We think Mrs. R. E. should avoid nagging Gail to "give Bert up." She should rather confine herself to encouraging her daughter to accept dates with others and to follow through with these contacts—even if they don't turn out to be entirely enjoyable. Eventually Gail will learn to enjoy her association with other boys and then she may find that she and Bert are happiest apart or as more casual friends.

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