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	<p>Thanks for your question. Almost nothing is more personal than our sexuality and associated feelings and desires, so I appreciate your candorless.</p> <p>Additionally, few aspects of our human being-ness are more complex than sexuality, so without more background I can only give a hunch as to what I think might be happening. I'll try to be as honest as you were.</p> <p>The short answer to the question "what is going on?" is: quite possibly a lot of things.</p> <p>I hear what sounds like anxiety in your concern, maybe even an undertow of loss in missing "the old, sexual me." Could it be you also miss the "sexual you"? Your feelings of loss seem to sync up with the loss of your ex, which implies this relationship was of profound emotional importance in addition to being "scorching hot." In fact, the scorching-hot experience is also powerfully emotional: passionate, spontaneous, wild, and playful. Sexuality is such an overwhelming experience because it inv</p> <p>As to your specific issue, first I would seek a medical checkup, just to rule out any possible physiological challenge.</p> <p>Ruling out medical challenges, I would reflect upon just what it is you lost, in terms of emotional relatedness, when you lost this partner. I would assume, for instance, that you could be "safe" to be yourself, to let intimate aspects of yourself come free. What made it so, as a best you can guess?</p> <p>As I read your question a second time, an idea occurs to me. You talk about sex as though it is a free-floating activity, almost as if having a partner is incidental to your sensual pleasure. But the more I study psychology, the more it seems to me that our existence is relational, very much bound up with important others. Sigmund Freud himself hypothesized that masturbation was a way to relieve the sexual attraction to a forbidden or incestuous other—a kind of furtive substitute for sexual longing. (Though</p> <p>I don't believe it's a coincidence that your loss in sex coincides with losing your ex. I'm curious what it is about this other person that created such powerful chemistry between you—what led to the end of the relationship? Is it unfair that if a couple have a very relationship in the bedroom, but struggle to relate, empathize, or communicate. I'm thinking particularly of romantic experimentation where needs or desires are "neutralized" and satiated physically—nothing wrong with that—while unsp</p> <p>I often work with people who can express a strong, historically normal need to be seen, valued, and respected only via sex or sexual role play, but not in more mundane daily interaction. In other words, the vulnerability is only physical or literal. Eventually, the relationship deteriorates if the emotional/psychological dimensions are not addressed. The work of the therapist is, often, in helping a person identify and articulate their needs, often difficult given highly critical or absent parents, though sticking with it of</p> <p>Another way of putting it: sexual satisfaction can temporarily soothe an emotional anxiety or yearning unrespected in the relationship, or a sense of frustration or entrapment, leading to only a fleeting sense of connection—which still does not address the relational friction.</p> <p>The more I write and think about it, I'm tempted to say what's happening here may best be described as growing pains. I've been told the novelist Graham Greene who said that, as we age, compatibility becomes more volatile than sex. This often happens to people who do as they grow into middle age.</p> <p>In that regard, you sound right on schedule, though I know it can be unsettling, and even trigger feelings of grief and loss, if a solitary sexual activity has been of consolation to you. Your current dilemma, then, could be facing a newfound vulnerability after having a person who co-created a very healthy chemistry. It often takes time we desire to share our existence with another more strongly than is consciously believed, whether it be primarily sexual or platonic or somewhere in between. This is often or an</p> <p>For men especially (though this certainly can apply to women, too), sexuality can represent, or signify, or have personal meaning in many ways: as a means of finding freedom, fulfillment, and validation or a sense of being strongly motivated and desired. The magical feeling of an air of romance can arise when we sense that our very being is desired by another, that this deep, profound desire is in sync with another's desire for us.</p> <p>This connection can feel transformative. It can loosen the grip of existential alienation or isolation, so many of us struggle with, in an act of modesty/understanding. Some of the people I work with in therapy report feeling most "hormy" or sexually hungry during or just after a period of grief.</p> <p>It is possible the situation is also difficult because your main means of consolation (sexually, masturbation) is elusive, or less effective, in the aftermath of the breakup that can be an unsettling realization. Indeed, though by no means hopeless.</p> <p>As we get older, we hopefully discover there is more to partnership than just the physical mechanics or hydraulics of sex. I sounds like you could really be joyous with this person, that you could both reciprocate and find exciting similarity of passion in the bedroom; what, I wonder, prevented this from happening outside the bedroom as well?</p> <p>Ever since my ex and I broke up a few years ago, my interest in sex has been in other words, it sounds like you made a profound emotional/relational connection, which you deeply miss. One plus one equals three, meaning two people in deep connection create a third element: the relationship itself. In all of it's maddening glory, you found unique chemistry with this person. How could it be the same on your own?</p> <p>Part of me wonders if this is more about getting older and less about something? You could, if the relationship is iteratively over, ask yourself what qualities of this person you found so attractive, what it is about them that made them so special, especially in bed? What didn't happen in the overall relationship that prevented it from continuing; can you look without heavy self-criticism at your participation here, your 50%, and see if anything can change to attract or keep the next person you'll hopefully meet?</p> <p>I don't feel like attraction is the issue, and I masturbate about as frequently as Perhaps the answer to the latter is emotional disease, companionship, or friendship—and some deeper self-acceptance, maybe even via counseling or therapy.</p> <p>I can understand your painful sense of loss, bewilderment, anxiety, and even frustration at the dilemma you describe so honestly. At the same time, there is a chance to "make lemonade" by finding or seeking the succor of deeper human connection and self-awareness, with a new partner and/or others who can relate or identify with what you're going through. It sounds like a kind of (garden the cliché) midlife crisis, and this is not uncommon in the slightest.</p> <p>You have identified a common frustrating part of experiencing grief—gratitudes from well-wishers who actually make things harder rather than easier. Nobody knows what you feel—not even a group of 34-year-old widows who lost their husbands in tragic accidents. Nobody. Your experience of grief is shaped entirely by your circumstances, experiences, and the way you make meaning of events in your life.</p> <p>While your sister's impulse was good—first connectors who people who "get it"—it sounds like what you needed at the time. My recommendation would be to find someone you can work with on your own so you can express your anger, frustration, sadness, loss, and rage against the events that took your partner from you.</p> <p>After I suddenly lost my husband to an accident last year, I attended a few There may be a time when you are in a different place than a group might be helpful for you, but none is clearly not the time. Hearing other people's stories of loss isn't making you feel connected. It's making you feel more isolated. That is not what you need right now. And while nobody can help you with what you are feeling, there are some aspects to grieving that seem to be shared with many other experiences. First, there is no single right way to grieve and there is no timeline. You will, over t</p> <p>And all of them wanted to let me they knew what I was going through. I know And I can't offer any words of consolation—for there are no adequate words—that know that what you experience is yours, and that you can heal. One of the paths of healing, however, lies in connecting with others—hence your sister's suggestion of a support group. Nobody knows your experience of your particular loss, yet there are people who do share your experience of feeling alone in their grief with nobody who understands. Maybe you can connect on that level. You also have three small people v</p> <p>Why Do People Say, "I know I know these people mean well and are just trying to comfort me, but when ap You asked why it is so hard for people to understand how unhelpful their "helpful" words actually are—and it's part it is because caring people want to help, want to correct, and want to make things better. Unfortunately, we don't often always know how to do so. There are no adequate words, so we settle for them. We are often profoundly uncomfortable with witnessing the distress of others, so we try to make it okay. Your loss is not okay. But you will be. Find the people who can just sit with you without needi</p> <p>I've been doing a lot of thinking lately about some heavy questions. What is it Engaging in existential psychology would provide you with a forum to explore these issues and their meaning to you. Developing an understanding of why these issues trouble you, and what they trigger in you would likely be a key part of the process. The aforementioned issues are in many cases actually answerable, and answering them would likely lead you to a deeper understanding of yourself. This can feel quite empowering and clarifying in ways that can be life-changing. It might even make the un</p> <p>I am not a spiritual or religious person. I believe in science and evolution. It's in addition to the question you express as you grapple with these issues, I also hear a genuine intellectual curiosity. With that in mind, I wonder if you would also benefit from taking some academic courses, attending lectures, or reading books and articles in fields such as existential psychology, existential philosophy, astronomy, astrophysics, and cosmology.</p> <p>Why Are We Here? Can Things? I'm not ing. To be fair, I ask these questions fully understanding its whatever course of action you choose. I encourage you to approach the journey with openness, curiosity, and a great deal of patience and tolerance for yourself. I hope your journey leads you to a place of understanding, but most of all, to a place of peace.</p> <p>How very painful it must have been to hear your wife say those words to you. It is not unusual for feelings to ebb and flow over the course of a relationship, but hearing a person say they no longer love you is hurtful. On the one hand, it sounds like your wife wants to "discover" her love again—meaning she has not closed the door on the possibility your love can be rekindled. She may be on a journey of her own and may need time and space to get there. However, it is difficult to rediscover love in a vacuum</p> <p>I've been married for 36 years and have four children. This past month, my v I also sounds as if you feel her withdrawing from you and your relationship, which also can be true. When you experienced your depression, I wonder if you experienced a similar need to withdraw from the relationship. Is there anything in your experience of the past year that can help you understand what she is experiencing? While she may not be ready to talk about the situation, it is reasonable to ask for some parameters. You can't rush another's process</p> <p>Since letting me know about how she feels, she has become very distant and There is much to sort out for each of you individually and both of you together. My recommendation would be for each of you to work with an individual counselor to clarify your needs and what you are able to offer one another; and if your wife is willing, to work with a couples counselor who can help the two of you decide how to be in relationship together.</p> <p>My daughter is 8 and reasonably well-behaved, well-mannered, energetic, bu I don't feel myself curious if you've talked to your daughter about how she feels about her father. If you haven't, it seems like it might be time. Invite her to be honest, and ask simple questions. Does she like him? How does she feel when she spends time with him? Is there anything she doesn't like about him? What does she wish was different about him? Keep the questions directed at her experience of him, do not ask her to weigh in on your decisions about the relationship—that's too much respons</p> <p>I've tried to talk to him about it, but he says he likes her just fine, it's just his wife who's really going off and it'll can change. This can only be addressed with him. It sounds like you haven't seen any change in his behavior with your daughter and the conversation between you and him is so unproductive that you have ceased trying. Perhaps it's time to consider entering the support of a couples therapist. Both of you are willing, a therapist can help you to move beyond this impasse and have a more productive conversation.</p> <p>My father is 8 and reasonably well-behaved, well-mannered, energetic, bu Parents are like that—mothers especially. They know what they fear their daughters, so they tell them how to get it and nag them until they do. It's fine for your mother to have ambitions and ideas as well as she is able to, but it is not okay for her to push them on to you. She wants you to want what she wants for you—what you want for you.</p> <p>My father doesn't seem I haven't dated much since my divorce, so I don't have anything to compare if it is something to engage in therapy with you, I might be a good idea to engage in your therapy. It is life-enriching. You've found a relationship you feel happy after and that's quite different than—what I guess would be—good reason—at all the impact might be for your daughter. There are a few answers here, and having the support of a therapist could be helpful as you try to set a course for your future.</p> <p>You don't say whether you fulfilled your mother's expectations to "stay away from boys" and focus on schoolwork and getting a good job. Parenting directives of that nature come from a good place and may be appropriate when you're a teenager. You don't know how old you are, but I gather you're not a teenager anymore. And while your mom may still mean well, only your internal directives matter now.</p> <p>In your mother's eyes, getting married and having kids are the next step. Perhaps you will want those things in the future, perhaps not. The bottom line is you're not there. You are not ready to get married and have kids as the self-aware enough to know that. So stick to your guns. Now is the time to explore who you are now and to pursue the life you envision for yourself now! But what can you do about your mother? How can you make her stop? I'd start by suggesting you tell her to back off, but I have</p> <p>You might try a karate master's technique and use your mother's energy or resolve. Focus on your strength and feel your power. Let your own strength and feel your power. Let your own strength, stay centered, and let her words go by.</p> <p>My grandmother used to say to me, "I'm going to let you do something. Promise you won't get mad." I would promise, then listen to what she had to say and feel my way through. This went on for years, until I learned to say, "If you know I'm going to get mad for you, why do you say it?" After a time, she stopped handing out her free advice and we got along much better. You might take a similar approach, but one that could prove effective right away: keep your response centered on your feelings about the behavior.</p> <p>Thanks for writing in. I, too, have not come to the last "open phone" policy and understand your reluctance, which I encourage you to pay more attention to. Before expounding, however, I'm going to briefly discuss what, exactly, a "boundary" is. In my clinical experience, since the term gets thrown around a lot and while meanings affor</p> <p>Since I like to work from a point of view I call "emotional mindfulness"—and what are love and intimacy if not emotion-based experiences?—I think of a boundary as an inflection point beyond which one will suffer in an unacceptable way. This point of departure must concern a specific behavior which causes a person a level of distress or suffering they are not able or willing to tolerate.</p> <p>It is, in other words, a way of warding off a negative emotional experience, which is why it's so important such things be discussed in a relationship with one on a mind and heart as possible—even if we suffer from what they don't "make sense" or conflict with our own way of viewing things. Concrete statements can be debated, while feelings remain indisputably personal: "here is how someone ought to behave in a situation" versus "this is what upsets or hurts or feels positive about this."</p> <p>My sense is you and your boyfriend are somewhat missing each other in this regard. On the one hand, you say, "To avoid giving me cause for alarm, I told him I'm sharing nothing." Thus, after an internal deliberation and perhaps anxiety, you agreed with his request—except you are writing to me about it, indicating there remains some issue or reservation.</p> <p>The concern I have here is that the focus has become centered on the mechanics rather than the emotional meaning of this sharing. By "meaning," I refer to how you both think and feel about what's happening and how it impacts the relationship. In a way, the background dilemma has been latent, not solved.</p> <p>The fact is you sit on a wedding becoming understandably concerning for your boyfriend. He got you that "frustration" you on Facebook, which you accepted. While your feelings of others aren't bad but they will be that. I would have you see can see how that might have been anxious-making for your partner, perhaps due to some of his own history (just as some of your years may have impacted your decision to friend the guy and/or agree to share photos).</p> <p>At all times, your boyfriend did not come out and discuss his concerns explicitly, which is part of the "missing each other" I mention above. He took a risk or physical expression rather than being verbally expressive in discussing it. You may have taken a similar route in agreeing to share your phone when you were hesitant, both of you bypassing the emotional risk or vulnerability so crucial to building closeness or intimacy. Your decision to friend this fellow—and here I'm reaching a bit—could mean you do not!</p> <p>The "I'm" and "we" parts are key. It's hard to put it all "red" above "we" in any relationship, especially when you don't get the other person's part or view more on that as a second, or if that POV conflicts with what you want to do on your own, freedom, and so on.</p> <p>I find generally that at behavior, especially when it concerns a close relationship, is a kind of communication, sometimes revealing intention that may or may not be conscious. On some level, your boyfriend's impulse to check your phone—which will require checking and rechecking because it doesn't address the underlying emotional problem, another reason it's only a Band Aid solution—is a way of saying, "I don't trust you."</p> <p>It could also be saying, "I do trust you, but I get so anxious about this that I must have validation or confirmation." It's hard to say no to this need to know."</p> <p>I have been with my boyfriend for going on three years. A couple of months ag Your decision to friend the guy at the wedding is a way of saying, "Hey, you can trust me, I'm loyal to you." I could also be a matter of "I have a hard time saying 'no' as it might hurt the other person's feelings, so it's safer to just agree."</p> <p>I thought this request was odd, to say the least. I told a couple of friends about Both of you overlap in saying, "Please understand this, don't be hurt"—agreeing with the other's behavior in a way that misses the underlying, more vulnerable anxieties or hopes for understanding. Thus, the relationship remains anxiously laden, which is probably why you decided to write in.</p> <p>We don't have a history of infidelity, so that can't be it. I've never betrayed him! In other case, you and your boyfriend have real (and understandably human) vulnerabilities around trust and betrayal. It's worth sitting down to have an open conversation in which you lay out for each other the other person's and their hopes and fears. It's feels uncomfortable, reach out to a therapist who can help facilitate things in an impartial way.</p> <p>So I'm not sure what's going on, but I don't like knowing my boyfriend needs Perhaps your boyfriend was once betrayed by a partner, leading to anxiety around this, perhaps you once said no to someone and it backfired or hurt you. In either event, I would think the solution has to come from within each of you in a shared way, rather than a physical or conscious way of controlling anxiety and postponing some stepping-outside-the-comfort-zone. We cannot avoid the need to emotionally reach—sometimes awkwardly, uncomfortably—in the growth required for long-term</p> <p>My boyfriend insists on CheWhat do you think is happening here? Am I going about this the right way? Shi I see this in couples counseling all the time, where one person needs to turn up the volume on their wants or needs (usually, in this case), while the other needs to dial it down in bit in terms of intrusiveness or demand (your boyfriend)—while both partners attempt to center on the emotional vulnerabilities driving the conflict, rather than resting in an external solution. Putting the car before the horse is something we all do, though the "horse" (i.e., the relationship) only ends up feeling blocked, restless, or cr</p> <p>The only people who can really evaluate how a relationship is working are the people who are in the relationship.</p> <p>That said, the behaviors you are describing would naturally raise concerns with those who care about you. The words he is using, especially "c—" and "w—" are aggressive words that are generally considered pretty disrespectful. The fact he uses these words when he is angry is a red flag. As far as terms of endearment go, they aren't very endearing. You are not "one of the guys"—you are his partner. There is a difference.</p> <p>The true indicator, however, is how he would respond if you said him to stop. If you didn't want to be called those names or would he dismiss them? Telling you not to "overthink" things seems pretty dismissive. Your attempt to raise the issue about your friends' feelings seemed to increase rather than decrease the behavior. That is not a sign of someone who is willing to take in alternative perspectives or be sensitive to the need</p> <p>I don't think my relationship with my boyfriend is that bad, but some of my fr Generally, how we speak to people is a reflection of how we think of them and usually a strong predictor of how we treat them. Using dismissive, disrespectful, or derogatory language tends to distance us from the humanity of the other person and allows us to ignore their feelings and needs. This may not happen intentionally, but it does a side effect of that kind of practice.</p> <p>For as long as we've been together (going on two years now), but he said if only you can decide if your relationship is working for you. I would encourage you, however, to think beyond the words and explore how your desires are being met in the relationship and how you feel when you are with this person. Do you feel cared for, loved, and respected? Do you feel your needs are valued and attended to? Do they feel like he is your number one fan and will support you through tough times? Does he help build you up when you are feeling low? Do you feel good about yourself when y</p> <p>It is Abuse When My Partner Co-optsMy, I'm used to it after all this time, but whenever he does this with me, it's language is not the biggest issue in your relationship. And if that's the case, you may want to speak with a qualified therapist who can help you sort through your feelings and your options.</p> <p>Everyone I know goes bonkers when they see a kid under the age of, say, 6. I really appreciate this question. So many people struggle with this issue. Having children, like any other life decision, is not for everyone. Some people are certain they want to have children, others are certain they don't want to have children.</p> <p>I never say this out loud, of course. But sometimes my dislike of kids inevitably Society seems to be at something of turning point on this. Issues of previous generations often get married and had children without giving it much thought, but other because it was just "what you did." These days, for many people, major life events—including marriage and having children—are not taken for granted, but rather thoughtful decisions based on the kind of lives they like to live. Still, there remain plenty of people who see these events as customary, desirable, traditional, or inevitable as</p> <p>I Don't Like Kids. I Don't Want K'm getting to the age where most of my friends are having kids, and this makes Before closing, I'd like to end on a practical note: You mention being isolated as more and more of your friends begin to have children. People generally become friends with one another because of some commonality or an experience that draws them together. This was probably the case for you and your friends when you met. As your friends move into parenthood, there can still be a place for you in their lives (and vice versa), but it may also be important for you to find some friends who are interested</p> <p>It is only natural you would wonder about who your birth parents are, what, and how, and why they decided to put you for adoption. Who people don't believe is curious? Who writes that your life, career, and family are disappointing, and perhaps you'd like to know that. Maybe you also wonder what your life would have been like if you hadn't been adopted. These days, there are numerous ways to look for people that may help you find your birth family—if you decide you want to.</p> <p>Many years ago, adoption information was not recorded or, if it was, the records were closed, but since 1980 most adoptive records are open. If you decide to look for more information, you can use social media, genealogy websites, and open records that should give you access to your birth certificate and other information. I personally know one person who found her birth mother on Facebook.</p> <p>You wonder what it might be like to meet your birth family or friends. This could be a good idea, but you may have siblings, for example. You might feel you have little in common with your birth family or, on the contrary, there is a lot you share. There is only one way to know for sure: but would the answer be worth the time and emotional energy you expend?</p> <p>You are worried about how this would affect your mental health. That is a good question, and I suggest this is such a big question that you might want to work with a therapist or professional adoption adviser who could accompany you on your journey. You would be hurting down the past and bringing it into the present. Working out whether you really want to do that, and then how to proceed if you do, may be no simple task. Finding your birth parents and meeting them would likely necessitate a big adjust</p> <p>I wonder if you know other people who have been adopted. If so, you might like to discuss your feelings with them and get to know how they understand their adoption. Talking to your partner is important, too.</p> <p>It sounds like you never discussed this with your adoptive family. It may feel like a delicate issue to bring up, but they could be enormously helpful in your search and may even feel it is important for all of you.</p> <p>My biological parents gave me up for adoption when I was born. I'm sure they you may fear rejection. Many people do. You birth family may have the same fears about you, and you might also reject your birth family once you meet them; there's no way to know. Your adoptive family could fear losing you. This delicate decision to find your birth parents requires a combination of wisdom and courage.</p> <p>As I have gotten older, I have had more and more thoughts about my Eithel decision—to know to not know—is wise and brave. Only you can decide what is the right path for you. Whatever you choose, I admire your courage and your process. You are not taking this lightly, nor should you.</p> <p>Should I Try to Find My Biological p's just don't know if it's wise, from the standpoint of my mental health. I Good luck, and I hope you check back in and let me know what happens.</p> <p>You've asked a great question, and you are not alone in asking it. Why do we seem to always think of the worst-case scenario when it comes to your health, and what can you do differently so we don't immediately thinking the worst? The answer to this question is very much tied to understanding what may be behind this in the first place.</p> <p>How you describe your concerns is consistent with what I conceptualized in the DSM-6 (the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) as illness anxiety, as well as what prior to this would have been considered hypochondriasis (debilitating worry about having a serious illness). Regardless, please know there are things you can do to keep the worry from getting the better of you.</p> <p>It's worth stating this about anxiety more generally: some people are more prone to either anxiety or hypervigilance (heightened awareness about small sensations or possible threats). This can happen for any number of reasons, and it's okay if you're not to be that way. What you are doing, essentially, is making sense of your experiences and protecting yourself from perceived threats of danger. While this can be adaptive—as doing so can tune you in to be</p> <p>By modifying the thoughts you have around bodily sensations, you can change your level of comfort. You will, in fact, be able to do just as you want—to be able to enjoy your life. Imagine how powerful a small shift in a thought can be. Instead of "This means I have a rare infection that will kill me," try something else. Perhaps, "It is possible this is something that warrants medical attention, but it is also possible this will go away on its own." You can learn how to modify your thoughts through psychotherapy.</p> <p>I'm a 27-year-old dental student with no serious medical issues other than age. Here are some other tips that are important to consider:</p> <p>I also think that because I am believing in these false ailments, it's causing my Beware of conducting your own health-related research. Many individuals who experience these anxiety find they spend a lot of time online researching suspected conditions or symptoms. I suspect you know this already, being a dental student, but sometimes reading about things that "could" happen seems as an unnecessary trigger for anxiety. Be mindful of the amount of time you spend conducting such research, as well as how you feel while reading information (especially compared to times when y</p> <p>Consider new ways of coping and reframing. You mentioned you gather that the people close to you are already getting annoyed by you regularly seeking reassurances. This is one mechanism you have developed as a part to manage anxiety. But it is frequently made problematic by these symptoms, which is essentially doing the same thing. You need reassurance that everything is sustainable in the long run, yet you have to learn additional coping</p> <p>Implement relaxation as a regular practice. What usually helps to reduce anxiety? Finding a healthy outlet for stress and anxiety can be a useful tool to have at your disposal, regardless of the stressors you face.</p> <p>Thank you for writing and sharing so much about your fear. Just talking about the subject of a phobia can create a connection, so I really appreciate your candor. As far as causes of arachnophobia, some research points to evolutionary explanations, meaning humans evolved to be afraid of spiders to avoid poisonous spider bites. Other research suggests social conditioning is the cause—i.e., as a child, you see people reacting with fear every time they see a spider, you may learn to be afraid of spiders.</p> <p>Okay, so I get that spiders play an important role in the ecosystem. I get that The good news is there is treatment that can help. Partnering with a therapist could help you gain the opportunity to uncover the root cause of your specific fear of arachnophobia. Beyond possibly gaining an understanding of the origin of your phobia, you can also work on moving past it. The first step to getting treatment to avoid the phobia and treatment for you. Since there is something specific you want to work on—arachnophobia—it makes sense to start by looking for local therapists who have experience i</p> <p>I've definitely been bitten by spiders before. I am guessing most people have after you identify a few therapists, call them and talk to them about what you are experiencing. Ask how they have been successful treating this issue in the past. Hopefully, these phone calls will give you a sense of which therapist and what approach you feel most drawn to. If you have it narrowed down to a couple of therapists, schedule consultations with both therapists to see which one seems like the best fit for you.</p> <p>How Can I Overcome My Fear of Why, then, am I so afraid of spiders? Well I always be this way, or am I arachn? I'm not sure if you succeed in finding the right therapist to help you tackle this. It sounds like this fear has created a lot of discomfort for you and even stopped you from doing some things you might otherwise enjoy—camping and hiking, for instance. You deserve a full, rich life free from this fear.</p>
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	<p>Thank you for writing I can't help but think the answer to your question lies in the emotional undertone of the question itself.</p> <p>As I'm sure you already know, the teen years are often a roller-coaster for teens and parents alike. It's a phase marked by intense contradiction, as a burgeoning young adult seeks individuation and freedom while under the care and protection of the very people they are trying to separate from. It's easy to get lost in the minutiae of curfews, driving privileges, allowances, homework, drugs, sex, and so on.</p> <p>Though I find it worthy question to ask, what is really at the heart of this? Usually it's anxiety or fear. On the parent's side, there is the fear the child will be somehow unsafe, now or later, and is throwing away a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Parents fear that the kid who struggles in school may not be well enough prepared for college later; the kid who experiments with pot may be "setting themselves up for failure" down the road; and the son who says no to full-ride scholarships at elite schools has some</p> <p>The teen, meanwhile, worries about the same thing, only from a different angle. Can I survive and flourish—socially, financially—once I've left the nest? If I'm too reliant on mom or dad now, what happens later when I'm working or at college? I can't rely on them forever. I know they want me to take these scholarships, get an education, but I want a different kind of education. What's wrong with that? To hell with 'em! I'm on my own!</p> <p>Anxiety, in other words, rules the day, as each side feels disrespected or abandoned or shut out by the other.</p> <p>Your letter's full of understandable parental anxiety focused mostly, it seems to me, on the future. He is "potentially" making his life or possibly throwing away opportunities that may or may not be "waiting for him" later on. One could say these scholarships are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. You could also say any kid with the smarts to get into Antioch with a 3.95 GPA, and with a willingness to take the road less traveled, will likely continue to find opportunities. I know plenty of struggling adults who</p> <p>You have, again understandably for a parent, developed a vision for the best path forward for your son. What father wouldn't want his son to go to Princeton or Stanford? I empathize with your confusion and frustration. I imagine you're bawling your hair out.</p> <p>But this is the great challenge of this mind-wrangling transition phase. As a parent myself, I foresee a time when his dad decided to become a doctor or lawyer (or better yet, a psychologist)—which means, of course, that when she's 18 she'll announce to us she's skipping college to join a punk band or travel to Antarctica to save seals. We want our kids to be safe; they want to work off to back off so they can't leave home, take a bite out of the world, and dance near the edge. This is it</p> <p>As often do in this column, I'll throw out 2 cents regarding some practical suggestions. I followed by a more psychological angle.</p> <p>First talk to your son—as respectfully as possible—about what you're seeing as the risk involved. The idea here is to model balanced decision making. Make sure he knows your "agenda" is only to talk through the decision with him. Does he know what a rare opportunity these scholarships actually are, how few kids get into these schools, for a free ride, no less? That these schools provide first-class opportunities for networking and forming contacts for just about any field of interest? That he could always</p> <p>Which branch of the military is he most interested in? What about it, specifically, draws him? What are they offering in terms of higher education down the road? What about any interest in specialty training? As to your points about his safety, is he interested in being deployed or dangerous assignments or tours of duty? If the answer is yes, would he be interested in doing some more research, such as talking to veterans who have served where he's interested in going? I don't know your son, so he may</p> <p>Empathy in the eye, says the psychotherapist. In this, I mean I would try to get as curious as you can about what drives him. Does he like the idea of discipline, training, and order? Is he excited and combat is interested in? Is the idea of the safety of a "strong" institution to which he will belong, a new kind of family?</p> <p>Listen for the hopes and yearnings more than the literal aspects. Then you might—as calmly as you can—explain why this is difficult for you and (possibly) your wife's. You have your own hopes and wishes for him as a caring dad.</p> <p>Our son, who turned 18 last month, is about to graduate from high school. He'll try to avoid a bag of us all fell into, which is playing the "this isn't normal" card. Example: "It's not normal for a kid as smart as you to enroll and blow off Stanford; it's just not rational." The implication here is he's weird, an oddball, or worse. I will probably make him dig his heels in even deeper. Make your statements personal, not about "what kids your age normally do" or in the vein of "what's really best for a guy like you, though clearly you don't see it. It . . ." It's possible he does see it and wants to do it</p> <p>So why play hell, would he possibly want to join the military? This is the dilemma! But again, be respectful, as this is his dream, his decision. You can disagree with him, but I would honor him for the way you love him I support.</p> <p>His mother and I both see the nobility in wanting to serve our country and we! Parenting can be extremely difficult, and it's a never-ending duty. But sometimes kids somehow have to do the one thing they know drives us batty. It can be a test to see if they will still be loved by us in spite of their decisions, or that they are capable of making their own decisions completely free from parental influence. If there is any element of rebellion in his decision, try to be understanding rather than dead-set against it, as that puts you in opposition and back at the tug-of-war.</p>
How Do I Stop My Son From Pot?	<p>Please help us. How can we convince our son that going to college is a wish I wish you the best of luck, and encourage you to post any follow-ups to us so we know what happens.</p> <p>Thank you very much for writing to me specifically, even though you don't trust me. I think it takes great courage to reach out and describe one's uncomfortable life situation to someone who is a stranger. You may be skeptical, but you have come forward and made contact. That means something. I hope you go one step further.</p> <p>Given that I did respond, you seem to conclude I just want you to come see me and pay me—that I'm in it for the money. It's true I need to make money and pay the bills, just as everyone does, but the unvarnished truth is I'm answering your letter because it's my job. What you do not seem to entirely up to you.</p> <p>Without spending time with you and getting to the root of your feelings, I can't offer a guess as to why you think the way you do, but I can readily see you're unhappy with your life and worried that just about everyone you know is out to get you. In one way or another: You say the only people you can trust are your parents, and that you have no friends. You have a girlfriend, but you're afraid she will leave you for someone else. It makes sense that you'd be unhappy. You describe that you are living in constant</p> <p>It always helps to discuss and bounce around your ideas with another person. Psychotherapy might be very useful to you. You've written a clear account of an aching life story of confusion, mistrust, and suspicion. You name your feelings and define your life situation with great clarity. Clear self-expression goes with clear thinking. You might find a therapist who includes journal work as part of a treatment plan. Or you might prefer talk therapy. Sometimes you have to try a few different things, or even then</p> <p>While you and a therapist identify ways to alleviate your painful feelings, the therapist can help evaluate their accuracy. Especially if you don't have many people you feel close to, to that you trust, a fresh and objective perspective from someone who knows what to look for can be useful. Fear responses and trust issues are often based on things that happened in the past, and uncovering what those things might be is an important part of finding healing solutions in the present.</p>
Why Am I So Paranoid and Suspicious?	<p>I am writing you specifically because you list suspiciousness/paranoia as one</p> <p>The kind of therapy or treatment you seek and find that might depend to some extent on your tastes, but I strongly advise you to make the effort. With some work, guidance, and reflection, you may find that your life (and perhaps your blood pressure) is better for it.</p> <p>You are right: therapy is expected to be a safe place where you can share your thoughts, experiences, and feelings without feeling judged, criticized, or condemned by your therapist. Keeping a nonjudgmental environment is one of the most critical things a therapist can do. Carl Rogers encouraged therapists to approach people with what he called unconditional positive regard, which is essentially the attitude of "no matter what you share, I still regard you highly." That's truly a healing condition.</p> <p>There are many ways to this to be considered. The fact is whether the therapist is actually helping you or whether you are misreading his expressions. While I'm certainly not trying to put the blame on you, it is important to consider that there may be something as simple as a communication going on.</p> <p>One of the critical aspects of the therapeutic relationship is openness. It is vital for both parties—therapist and person in therapy—to be able to communicate their feelings and experience to the other. In doing so, you deepen the therapeutic relationship and build trust, which helps you feel safer. With that said, I encourage you to share your concerns with your therapist. It could be that he is unaware of his expressions and how they come across. Your sharing your experience with him can help him become more aware</p> <p>Based solely on what you have written, there is also a possibility that the therapist is actually responding negatively and you are reading into his nonverbal responses; in therapy, we call this "projection." Projection is when a person projects his or her feelings about someone or a situation onto another person or holding those feelings. In this case, for example, it could be that you feel judgment toward yourself and, as such, are seeing it in the therapist.</p> <p>Having this dialogue can help you to resolve your internal conflict and make an informed decision going forward. By discussing your concerns with your therapist, you can choose your next step in a way that empowers you and you not from a reactive space. Above all, provide for a great healing experience.</p> <p>Starting over with another therapist is always an option, but I recommend that as a last step instead of a first. Try starting by talking to your therapist and giving it some time to see how things change (or don't change). If you don't feel better about the relationship after a while, that might be time to find another therapist to work with. The most important thing is that you are getting what you need from the therapeutic relationship, and only you can be the judge of that.</p> <p>I hear your frustration coming through loud and clear and it is totally understandable. You've been out to everyone for over two decades and feel deeply liberated by it. You know you'd like to celebrate your year and commitment to your partner publicly, but instead you feel pressured to speak about resentment with your wife. The contrast between how you and he are living your lives could not be more stark. Since you are also sharing your love, there is bound to be discomfort for each of you as y</p> <p>This is a deeply complicated issue and one that is threatening not just to each of your identities. You identify as a proud and out gay man, and this relationship is putting you back into the "closet" to a degree. Although American society has made progress over the past 30 years with regard to LGBT rights and acceptance—legally marrying your partner, for instance, was impossible until relatively recently—there is no question that discrimination and stigma are still problematic f</p> <p>Considering the depth of these issues, partnering with a couples therapist could be invaluable for the two of you. Through couples work, you could explore these identity issues and how they impact your relationship. Engaging in the process together might offer an opportunity for you both to develop a stronger sense of empathy for the other's position.</p>
We're Living a Lie: I'm Out as a Proud Gay Man in My Mid-40s, but I've Not Told Anyone I Know	<p>I'm sorry to hear that you are struggling with this. You are engaging in your own therapy to explore some of these issues and have sought a therapeutic relationship as you try to figure out what you would like to do to feel more at peace.</p> <p>Thank you very much for reaching out. It takes courage to write and ask questions about experiences you're not sure are "normal." You explain that you have disturbing thoughts sometimes, ideas that just pop into your brain and sound scary and awful, and make you feel terrible for thinking of them. You're worried these thoughts might be an indication something is wrong, since they appear in your brain without your permission. You assure me you want to understand their meanings.</p> <p>First off, let me say to you we all have strange, unbidden, or upsetting thoughts sometimes that seem to arise from nowhere and then simply pass through our minds. Of course, these ideas and images have to come from somewhere, and I would say they come from the unconscious. The unconscious is where dreams, feelings, emotions, and thoughts reside, in the background of our minds, but sometimes they break free of the unconscious and become suddenly conscious and it feels like they occur to us v</p> <p>Although you don't say this directly, I have the suspicion you might not feel so bad but also guilty about what goes on in your mind. Other people feel afraid or guilty about their thoughts because thoughts can feel close to actions. But remember: thinking is not the same as doing.</p> <p>It is interesting to try to figure out how the human mind works. The examples you mention include violent actions—hurting others, hurting yourself. It might be helpful to consult with an expert in how the mind works to see what is bringing these types of thoughts to the foreground at this time. Is something happening in your life, something to do with work or love or friendship that is bothering you, perhaps even without your knowing it? Have these feelings been occurring to you for a long while? Weeks? Mo</p>
Is It Normal to Have Intrusive, Disturbing Thoughts Sometimes?	<p>I don't want to have and that Working with a therapist might help you understand your thoughts better and also feel confident. You won't drive actions, but you'll be able to live with the anxiety and help you get to know yourself better.</p> <p>I told my husband a little over six months ago now. I am only 30. He passed up a year you are afraid of losing your children or afraid they will feel painful memories of your husband. You also wonder if your anger is a factor. The answers are inside you, but based on what you've related, in all likelihood yes—at least, and probably more. Your world has changed vastly and dramatically, and not by any choice of your own. Feeling lost and disconnected and sad and angry are absolutely natural responses to all of this. Grief is complex.</p> <p>I am so sorry for your loss. You are understandably grieving. You've told us "The stages of grief—denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance—do not necessarily flow smoothly or quickly. Many people move from one stage to another and back again as memories and feelings are triggered. There is no timeline for moving through your grief and integrating it. Time will help, but so will finding the right kind of support.</p>
Why Can't I Bond with My Kids? I've Gotten Overwhelmed because you Reserves of Emotional Energy are Depleted	<p>If you haven't already started working with a therapist in your area, I recommend that you find one for yourself and for the children, either together or separately. Having a safe and supportive place to work through all the feelings that come with such a loss and major life transition can help you heal and find your way back to your children. . . . and yourself.</p> <p>I imagine a lot of courage to share this deeply painful experience with a doctor and to write on here and share it here, but I see like you are ready to begin to address the past trauma and take a look at how it might be impacting your life in the present.</p> <p>The good news: a diagnosis with the information you provide here, it does sound possible that you are dealing with posttraumatic stress (PTSD) related to the sexual abuse you experienced as a child. Whether or not you actually need to be diagnosed for PTSD, there is probably a connection between your past abuse and the problems you are dealing with today. These problems—difficult trusting, unexplained anger, periods of depression, conflicted feelings about children, and nightmares—are</p> <p>What I cannot name there absolutely is hope for healing from this. I have worked successfully with many people over the years who have similar stories. We have worked together to help them heal from the pain of the past trauma and to be able to move forward in the present. This insight creates the opportunity to find new ways of being in the present—ways that don't create obstacles for living full, healthy lives.</p>
I Was Sexually Abused by My Sister When I Was 7 or 8 Years Old. I Was Alone	<p>I encourage you to find a therapist not who can partner with you on this journey. You deserve to have a full and healthy life, and I can only imagine the range of emotions you are experiencing after a lifetime like this. Based on the information you provided, the way your husband handled the situation absolutely seems unfair to you. Working with no prior conversation can indicate either a lack of care and respect for your feelings and your relationship or deeper issues of his own. He may be going through something that complicated him to make a major life change with no clear plan of where he was going next. Either way, trust t</p> <p>He resisted attempts to go to counseling in the past and he has told you let you know that he has decided to do so now. Take him at his word. It takes two to fight for a marriage—and if he is not willing to even engage, fighting for your marriage will be an exercise in frustration for you and potentially damage what remains of your relationship. Not fighting doesn't mean you don't care about your marriage. By not fighting, however, you may be able to begin your grieving process, and subsequent healing process, more</p> <p>His departure and refusal to explain or consider working on things has not only hurt you deeply, but also likely left you feeling powerless. One important part of healing will be reclaiming your power. I recommend that you connect with a local counselor who can provide support and perspective as you grapple with the emotions that naturally will arise for you.</p> <p>Through counseling, you can determine how you want to grieve and move forward. You can get support to handle the anger and confusion you are feeling. You can choose how to handle future conversations and interactions with your husband. You can choose whether staying connected to him is in your best interests or not. You can choose whether or not to remain friends.</p>
My Husband Left Me! Let Him Go! I Came Home from Work the Other Day and My Husband Was Gone. His Belong	<p>Thank you for reaching out. I hope, with support, you find resolution for the understandable pain you feel that allows you to move forward with a clear mind and heart.</p> <p>It sounds like you are still in a great deal of pain after the loss of this relationship. I hear you when you say moving on is more difficult than it sounds. I also hear you expressing a very common belief that you need to be able to speak to your ex in order to gain a sense of closure, but the good news is . . . you don't. In fact, it often seems that continued contact with an ex (especially if the contact revolves around reheating what went wrong) just leads to more questions, fewer answers, and an emptier feeling</p>
Help! Long After My Breakup, I	<p>I suspect the answers about what keeps you hanging on to me within you. I imagine the sense of "surprise" or reference as being less about seeking answers from someone you can't access and more about the inability to access answers from anyone. It sounds like you have spent a good bit of time trying to resolve this by talking to her, by talking to your friends and family, and thinking things through on your own. I would suggest trying something different—like partnering with a therapist. Friends</p> <p>With the limited information I have, all I can do is make general suggestions, but working with a therapist will give you the opportunity to understand why the end of the relationship has been so painful for you. Identifying whatever it is and healing from it may offer the closure you seek and maybe even lead you to a new, healthier, more rewarding relationship.</p> <p>First, thanks for writing. Second, I'm sorry to hear about your travels. I can only imagine the exhausting and frightening roller-coaster you have been riding. Finally, this may or may not surprise you, but even as a therapist I can relate to your question, "What kind of therapy is best?" I recently read an article by a newly licensed and overwhelmed therapist who said there are something like 200-plus "modalities" for therapists to choose from. It seems every other day someone is inventing a new approach!</p> <p>Fortunately, clarity can be found, because ultimately any good therapist—in my experience—is there to answer the question, "What is most helpful or healing for this particular person at this particular time?" Nearly all research studies come to the common conclusion that a safe and trusting therapeutic relationship is central to a helpful treatment. If someone has a viscerally strong response for or against one of my recommendations, my job is not to call this "resistance" but rather to listen, explore, and tea</p> <p>So, point one: is the therapist you're talking to listening to you, as an individual, not a generic "anxious client" or "parent of an addicted child," etc.?</p> <p>In general, humans bring pre'terms to ambiguity, but offering too much certainty as a therapist is misleading and maybe even unethical. No one has a "lock" on what to do for sure. Now, practical suggestions can be helpful and reassuring. A common "tip" a therapist might offer someone in your situation might be to attend AAnon meetings. It certainly couldn't hurt to try the program. There is much to be gained, even if it ultimately isn't a good fit. (It's return to AAnon in a minute.) Other suggestions, i</p> <p>What if a person grows up in a family where setting certain types of boundaries, or stating one's needs or limitations, drew traumatizing emotional fire? Are they being weak for not "speaking up" or "asserting their needs"? Trauma tells us sometimes it's still prohibited or unsafe to do this. This is where self-help gives way to psychology, to empathic understanding and exploration of a person's experiences, beliefs, and needs. Some parents m</p> <p>Other factors you'd want to look for: experience with addiction as it affects families, knowledge of treatment options (including local or community support groups besides or in addition to AAnon, and an understanding of AAnon, come to think of it) and a patient but persistent curiosity about your experience. If it seems like a lot to ask, it may be, but to be honest, so what? Addiction is a merciless, complicated issue (some prefer to say "disease," others don't). It takes a lot from people and asks a lot from</p> <p>I also suggest you try at least two or three therapists to get a sense of different styles and to form. This is one of the most important things you can do.</p>
What Kind of Counseling Should I Seek? Our 22-year-old daughter was arrested	<p>Finally, a word on AAnon. Some swear by it, others say "they away of all costs." I think any rigid position is potentially harmful. I think trying it is a good idea. It is also good role modeling for your child, who may not be as keen on attending meetings at first but may ultimately find them essential. I try a few different meetings, attending one and disliking it is common, but no two meetings are the same and some fit better than others. Some are turned off by the spiritual talk, others aren't. I suggest you take i</p> <p>There is no question that attachment problems can create significant tension and strife in families. Often, one or more of the surviving relatives have distorted and unfairly biased. The only person, however, who has the right to decide how to move forward is the person creating the wall.</p> <p>Your mother may have some very clear reasons for refusing to establish the way she has. Of course I don't feel free to you, but what's the best for always right, and maybe right isn't always fair. It may be that your mother feels that her son who stopped close and helped her out so much is now a threat to her. I'm sorry to hear that you're in a difficult moment of the estate. It may be that she is concerned about his ability to thrive after she is gone and is trying to make sure he is taken care of. If this is the case, it may be that she has a</p> <p>If you focus on how wrong or unfair her choice seems, you may be met with defensiveness and withdrawal. If you start from a place of accepting that it is her right to make that choice, but that you do for her choices better, you may be able to come to a better understanding. The right thing to do is explain her thinking in a way that makes sense to you, and she might be able to hear and respond to your pain—but not if she has to defend the "rightness" of her choices.</p>
Help! I Resent My Mother for Still Recently Found out that my mother's will gives one of my brothers as much as	<p>However, you choose to approach this, I strongly recommend that you find a way to make peace with your mother's death. That night means seeking personal counseling for yourself to let go of anger and resentment, or perhaps family counseling with your mother and possibly your brother. You have the opportunity to address these issues while she is here to respond. All too often, resentments are left to fester until it is too late to heal the rift.</p> <p>I find myself filled with compassion for you. It sounds like as many of the common, everyday sounds of life are extraordinarily uncomfortable for you. I imagine it's overwhelming with the world around you nearly impossible. It must feel very tiring for you. I hope that as you find this compassion for yourself, so</p> <p>What I certainly cannot make a diagnosis from your brief note (nor is this my expertise), it sounds like you could be describing a condition called somatization—a sound sensitivity disorder. It is not currently listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), but it has recently been getting attention in the mainstream media and has therefore gained some exposure. There is a website, www/</p>
Help! Every Sound I Hear Makes me Stand Hearing Just about anything. Whispering, chewing, breathing, a	<p>Whatever steps you take to address this, I hope you do seek out help. You mention sometimes feeling like a "twitch" and wanting to "grow it out of this." These sentiments suggest you feel your sensitivity is a character flaw rather than acknowledging that you might well be dealing with a condition (misophonia). Regardless of the cause, you are suffering, being kind and compassionate with yourself will get you much further than being punitive.</p> <p>Thank you for reaching out with this honest question. I commend you for having the courage to admit this is happening and to seek counsel for it.</p> <p>You may be surprised to know that what you are experiencing with your therapist isn't uncommon. In fact, what you are likely experiencing is a phenomenon known as "tactile transference," which is when a person experiences feelings or fantasies of a sexual or sensual nature with or her therapist.</p> <p>It is easy to see why you might have developed these feelings. Your therapist may embody many, if not all, of the qualities you may desire in an ideal mate. The therapist is accepting, attentive, kind, and nonjudgmental and, for at least an hour every week, fully engaged with you. One of the problems with this sort of situation is that you are falling for an image you have of the therapist, not for who the therapist actually is. You know very little about him, and you have used your imagination to fill in the rest. Y</p> <p>It is not "safe" to share this with your therapist—in fact, it can actually become a significant turning point in your relationship with him. In many cases, this deepens the therapeutic work and allows you to process things in a much deeper level. It will take courage and trust for you to share this with your therapist, but taking that kind of risk is therapy is necessary for growth. There are a number of ways to help your therapist right respond. Ideally, he will be able to help you recognize what is going on behind</p> <p>Of course, if he is not comfortable with continuing with you, he may offer you another therapist. Unfortunately, there is no way to get an definitive answer as to how he might respond.</p> <p>When he sought not to do this because he has similar feelings as you or on feelings. As you mentioned, there are also cases in which therapists who have similar feelings or experiences to the people they help for a certain time period after termination of the therapy (it depends on your state). Regardless of state regulations, the ethics code of the American Counseling Association (2014) specifies that there must be a five-year period between the end of the counseling relationship and the start of a sexual o</p>
Should I Tell My Therapist I Haven't Been seeing my therapist weekly for eight months. I really, really like him	<p>I hope you can navigate this with grace and recognize that what he feel on can be and often is a part of the therapeutic relationship. In fact, I can't think of one therapist I know who hasn't experienced this, so please don't feel as though you are an anomaly. It's very normal, but the important thing is how you handle it; be honest, at with his response, and most of all, treat yourself with the deepest level of care and compassion you can muster.</p>

[Thanks for your honest letter. This is not just what you're going through, from me especially - in a way, it means you're growing up and are now ready for some honest-to-godness soul searching \(Which may prompt you to write\).](#)

[Carl Jung once said it's only when you person get a glimpse of their mortality, often in middle age, that therapy begins. We lose some of our youthful fancies, and time becomes more precious.](#)

[I find replacing your question, it would be, "What really matters to me? And what does sex mean to me?" I used to be super excited but it no longer does the trick, and that's frightening. How come? Little more to do this happening in their mid-40s, though there's a good chance what is happening is at least as psychologically rooted as it is physiologically. Maybe you need something more fulfilling to yourself, out of life, and out of relationships.](#)

[First of all, Patricia. Many men in their mid-to late 40s begin experiencing bodily changes in which the vitality of youth ebbs somewhat; we may need more sleep, experience more aches and pains, develop a little drop in the depression or anxiety that's dogged us over years, and so forth. Our dev-il-may-care resilience loses some of its bounce, and that's hardly fun for anyone—especially men, many of whom identify their potency, sexually and otherwise.](#)

[So, maybe experiencing some shame along with how if you have a history of feeling "not enough." Many men who turn to sex for emotional self-sustaining effort struggle, sometimes unconsciously, with shame and self-doubt. It's as if for buds and gentials are believing or walking out on the job, and were a little ashamed of what's become so important for the job, what we think we need but doubt it \(pornography, for example\).](#)

[So, that word you are not alone, much of this is normal for creeping middle age. You may want to get a physical \(if you haven't already\) to make sure it's not a medical issue. In fact, that would be the first thing I'd do, just to be safe. You allude to some erectile dysfunction, which will unusual for men your age, is something a medical professional may be able to help with.](#)

[I once read an interview with a psychologist who treated men for erectile challenges. She said, "Penises tell us a lot about what their owners are feeling." Perhaps some of your recent life experience is deflating. In more ways than one, as someone who treats addictions, I can tell you that people often become anxious when repetitive behaviors are no longer the elixir or dynamic outlet they used to be. In a way, this is a sign of maturity, but it can bring anxiety with it.Rather most telling for me—and, frankly, less, like any interpersonal transaction, never happens in a vacuum. Even men who "love 'em and leave 'em" typically are operating of strong feelings and fears regarding intimacy; perhaps they fear or are ashamed they aren't too much, so they go back to things or things or things. It may sound strange, but some men I help have fallen in love with prostitutes or strangers in cafes, from a distance, may seem delusional. I am not suggesting this is your issue, mind you, though there are plenty I'm going to go out of my mind and say this change here may be a kind of loneliness at a gut or soul level that is elusive or out of your awareness. It's a catch-22 in some men, desire to close relationship is shameful \(not masculine\), so it gets channeled into sexuality, which is fun and safe due to emotional distance \(which porn provides\), which is unsatisfying in the long run, leading right back to square one: isolation, shame, and maybe even heartbreak.](#)

[You can "decide" our sexuality in a tricky way helps explain how we connect with others and friends and family. The man who insists on being top or on the bottom is bed or dominant \(or passive or inquisitive or the masochist\) or he passes in bed and dominant in the boardroom\). The trick of sex is that it's a pleasurable reality and the height of intimacy.](#)

[Graham Greene, one of my favorite novelists, once mentioned in an interview his belief that as he got older, being more interested in companionship and less in "exciting" sex. The closeness and trust between partners is what's exciting, not so much the novelty or the physical activity. Not that there's anything at all wrong with the latter. It's just that we may need to be careful not to put all our psychological eggs in one basket, while it's "hot" to fall into to shift to what we get older and mature, as the emotioner](#)

[When I want to talk to other women who are going through this, a therapy support group or individual counseling or even online support can be helpful in opening up questions, understanding, and recognizing that you're having a very personal experience that we live in. In one way or another, we all have our own story to tell. For me, we may be told one day, "You seem to answer to that you did something, anger all circumstances of each other and your own," back "I assume you mean the way we've been looking at the appearance of a "nude" from a bad 1950s movie."](#)

[He is still the old me, still good—still struggling with something beneath all of that strange and troubling behavior; I would hesitate to conclude he is defining "humility" by because I would bet, in the larger context of his life, his behavior probably makes some sense. Most teens go through a rebellious phase, whose aim in part is to annoy or even frighten the living hell out of parents. So I wouldn't take the bait completely. Of course this is very concerning and needs to be investigated, and construct](#)

[Seeing this as a family problem, not his problem or your problem, is key. Drawing in teachers and school counselors' goal is to include the parents of the other "bullying" kids in town. Something is attracting him to this crowd, what is it?](#)

[And again, what was happening before? Was he a good student? Fortunately, this is all happening now more or less under your wing, which tells me this is part a communication of attack—a rebellion, perhaps angry communication at that. As far as I'm saying, "I'm making my own rules, got it?" But what might be happening in the family dynamic such that feels compelled to "say" and "do these things?" And why isn't he fearful of consequences? The compulsion to do these things, which includes running &](#)

[Why might he identify with these things, incidentally? Try to rally up yourself in his shoes and look black/white, right-and-wrong thinking. The harder you push for "the right side" of the line, the more he'll likely stand on the other side and dig in. Welcome to the teen years, but keep in mind this may be the only way he knows how to express whatever he's happened inside you, probably irresistibly.](#)

[Of course your children are understandable, given his behavior at school and his alarming digital/social use. Yes, many teens experiment with booze and pot, but in this case it's possibly early harm to be using it such a casual way \(as opposed to knocking a beer or joint in their car at a concert\). Again, it's as if he wants you to know about it, as it's happening, right after your nose.](#)

[In some cases, children have had to be "good" for so long that this goodness becomes a burden, often privately felt, leading to a swing in the opposite direction. Or there's an anxiety or fear of drugs and booze cover up. Could you ever find some rebellious expression in arenas besides pot—such as music, drama, filmmaking, sports, etc.? Something assertively gritty or super cool where he can stand out and feel good about himself? Teens want to be cool and feel cool, it's all ways, be a computer guru,](#)

[It's good that he wanted to feel cool and have friends; what's not cool is that his current behavior will lead him nowhere positive in the long run.](#)

[Has your son demonstrated an interest in anything previously that might provide for his self-expression? Anything creative rather than destructive? Can he or a counselor or teacher help him find such a direction? Anything that can "hook" his interest can help him find a way back into engagement with school, such as a magnet school for music or technology, for instance. Volunteer work, too. Karate. Photography. Fly fishing. Think outside the box; offer him incentives for trying something new. Maybe his](#)

[Use and your husband ought to decide, first, what is and isn't acceptable to you both. Make sure you're both on the same page. The calmer you are in general, the safer he'll feel bringing his troubles to you. I recommend tough love if and after the other ideas flop.](#)

[Usually a child he ages struggles with developmental challenges. He may not be completely comfortable talking to you about them, which isn't your fault. Is there a school counselor or teacher who can get involved? What do these folks, probably seasoned observers of teens, think might be happening? What about the parents of his pals?](#)

[Does your son have an uncle or grandpa, some adult he trusts, who can spend some time with him and give him open up about what's going on? Can they go to a movie or a ballpark? Take a walk, say, and parents are often the wrong messengers for the right message because of the rebellion factor. Also, children need to complain and gripe about their folks a bit, sometimes "delinquency" is a kind of grandiose, covered-up lament or expression of hurt feelings that they feel can't be expressed](#)

[What do the parents of these "bad influences" have to say? The more communication among all of you, the better. You don't need to know where your son is, whether none, and to let him and his friends know that caring eyes are watching.](#)

[Also, what is your own attitude toward drinking and drug use \(including pills\)? That may have some bearing on your son, if you or your husband pick up too forward rigidity or looseness; at any rate, his drinking and smoking is a symptom of something deeper, neither a help nor a hindrance if done responsibly if overdone.](#)

[It would be interesting to reflect upon when and how the "real version" of your son changed, and what may have been going on in the overall context of his life. We all change. But there was any big change? New neighborhood, new school, the loss of a girlfriend? It's self-medication with drugs and alcohol, why? What might be causing anxiety, worry, or other troublesome feelings? It's worried about dating, college, becoming a man? I think it is important to remember he is still the boy you love, struggle](#)

[Also, what bothers about this behavior? Are you concerned you or others will offend you? parental "failure"? Are you imagining the worst—I.e., he headed for the penitentiary if he doesn't stop this presently? Are you already preparing the care package you'll take to the visiting center, where he'll be waiting in an orange jumpsuit? Try not to panic, as this may alienate him and scare him off. I know many productive, happy adults who went through a "dark period" in their teens. In fact, it's better to get finally, the most important part of it, which may sound somewhat contraindicated \(but hear goes\): "Take care of yourself. One thing parents forget, and I include myself, is that we are most of role models for our children, even when they act like we're invisible \(or invisible\). Sometimes, our children will "counter-identify," meaning they'll take on the "reverse" identity of a parent, to distinguish themselves as different. Your son's behavior is communicating something important to you, most likely un-](#)

[Children often feel the implication that they are responsible for their parents' emotional well-being. This only decreases and constrains the very freedom they're itching to deny. Of course parents get upset or angry or anxious when a child is trouble—that's normal—but I'm talking about something more profound, a core, existential sense of OK-ness. Parents who feel, consciously or not, that "my child's" performance is a direct reflection of my own core worthiness" are setting themselves up for grow and](#)

[I like the concept from recovery programs of "attraction, not promotion." You want to provide an attraction to a peaceful sense of stability, calm, and strength which they personally embody. Not posture and picket up all of this behavior, which will only make him defensive and/or angry. In a way, you and his dad are the guarantors for safety, in deed and not in thought. The guardrail needs to be flexible but not breakable, solid but not overly forceful \(or firmy\). Our children provide our own proof to grow](#)

[As the National Institute on Drug Abuse has a paper for parents on teens. There are three other good resources for parents on the internet also.](#)

[I wish that both of you could see each other and share your concerns. Unfortunately, they are her children. You will not get anywhere with your sister if you lecture her about the choices she is making. Letting her choose \(directly or indirectly\) you think beyond an "adder" will most likely only serve to distance her from you and strengthen her bond to him. It also makes it less likely she would confide in you if she had the opportunity to do so.](#)

[As far as sister is technically an aunt, yes. You characterize her behavior as shallow. That belief may be contributing to a dynamic that makes her believe you and her parents don't respect her, will not care for a capable adult, and don't understand her needs. Over time, during, of course she will grow into who she is. She may be inclined to "look" to her boyfriend as a source for her independence. As long as you continue to approach her with compassion, little by little, she will improve. Also, even if you](#)

[His drug use is absolutely a concern. Not only are there potential physical, financial, and legal ramifications for what she is doing, but emotionally, it is likely distancing her from you and your parents and committing her to her boyfriend as well as impacting her ability to make effective choices. Working with a family therapist and an addiction specialist \(with or without your sister\) can help you identify some effective intervention strategies. Attending a Nar-Anon meeting could also shed some light](#)

[We are alone—and everybody loves the holidays, and plenty of people hate them. Thanksgiving is only round one, yet got stuck with a real nightmare, the endgame \(December\), Christmas or Kwanzaa or Hanukkah or whatever version of your holiday—or... or that's been chosen for you. I suppose.](#)

[Not to mention if gets really dark really early now and, depending where you live, stores freezing cold and snowy. The celebrations you don't feel part of, plus the longer nights, the light deprivation, and the crappy weather, can cause emotional and physiological reactions that make you feel even worse.](#)

[A lot of people struggle with the commercialization of the season as well, many places set up holiday displays and started giving in seasonal music before summer was over! For many people, the significance of the holidays, or what they're supposed to stand for, is lost in the hustle and bustle.](#)

[No, you are not a terrible person for feeling down this time of year. A great many people feel depressed and stressed and lonely and grief-stricken and resentful this time of year. I may seem like everybody else is celebrating with special loved ones and you're not, and you may feel all alone and, hence, obligated to join everyone else's party because you don't feel as for you. But remember, not everyone has family, not everyone has family they want to spend time with, and not all families have loved ones to have to save the family](#)

[There's a store near here I live. Every year about this time, they put a sign in their window "Sharpen your knives for the holidays." It's a hardware store, so I read it literally—in my knives and wtf sharpen them right, but for what? I always wonder: Are those knives for slicing up turkey and ham or for self-defense? Do we kind of feel like turkeys and ham, sitting around the big table with all those relatives we have nothing to say to and who don't like us much anyway?Do you have to give the sign](#)

[Put aside for a moment, family expectations. What would YOU like to do? What would make YOU happy? Some reflection on why, specifically, the holidays are so rough for you may help guide you as you search for ways to get through them. Any form of self-care might do. You deserve to feel taken care of, even if it's you doing the caretaking.](#)

[Forget, for a moment, everyone else's expectations of you which are probably based on the expectations others have of them, anyway. What are YOUR expectations, both of judgment and of offers? The weight of seeing like you have to meet someone else's expectations can add to heaviness of the holidays. What good matters to you and strive for that, first and foremost.](#)

[On the other hand, how long do the holidays last? Two dinners together can't last longer than, say, twelve hours each, maybe? Or confuse, in some families, even though much time can feel like an eternity. I may be coming to know boundaries in order to ensure that your needs are met. They could be found limiting your exposure to family gatherings or festivities in whatever way makes manageable or palatable. Two hours per event? Three? A 10 limit per gift? No gifts? Whatever](#)

[There somebody you can talk to? There is always somebody, even if that](#)

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

	<p>Having paranoid thoughts does not mean you are crazy. Some people have these thoughts as a result of feeling anxious or stressed. So you have company: other people have feelings like these too. Nevertheless, paranoid feelings are tough to live with and there are ways to help.</p> <p>First off, you have support from your community. You are lucky that people are standing behind you. I see from your letter that your friends are trying to be helpful and reassuring, and that your family tells you that you are safe. Even though you believe them on the one hand, on the other hand you're not always sure that they should be believed and you're still scared. Your folks are telling you that "everything is OK," but that doesn't necessarily make it so. People want to make things OK for their loved ones.</p> <p>The best course of action is for you to get checked out by a medical doctor who will give you a thorough physical examination to determine if, for example, you have high blood pressure, which can cause many different types of unpleasant thoughts and feelings, as can various types of seizure disorders. Certain substances and recreational drugs can also cause feelings of intense fear and suspicion, so if you do use marijuana, hash, meth, LSD, cocaine, alcohol to excess, etc., be aware that this is a possibility.</p> <p>You write that these experiences first began about three years ago, and I wonder if you associate this time to any other events in your life. This is a question that your doctor should ask you. You should be completely open and frank in all your responses to help find out what is going on.</p> <p>Perhaps your doctor will refer you to someone who specializes in understanding experiences such as yours; that person might determine if you in fact are having paranoid thoughts, and what you might do next. A psychiatrist, if you decide to see one, might prescribe a medication that will help control your anxiety, and/or you might be referred to a psychologist or mental health counselor who will engage in talk therapy with you. The therapist will try to understand the meanings of your experiences.</p> <p>Often people are frightened of seeing a practitioner who specializes in these kinds of issues, perhaps because of feelings of shame or because they don't really know what happens in a psychiatrist's or psychologist's office. Some folks are afraid that if they are prescribed medication, the medicine will somehow make them different in a way that they don't want, as though the medicine will take them over, as they also fear the doctor might. People are afraid of losing control, or a sense of themselves.</p> <p>There is a lot of prejudice and misinformation about emotional issues—we tend to see things as though we are living in a movie, maybe a scary one, but not trying to find out what is going on with oneself is much scarier. Please see a doctor and let me know what happens.</p> <p>Here are some things people sometimes fear about psychiatry:</p> <p>They will think I am "crazy" and lock me up. They will give me medicine that will make me a zombie. They will take control of my life. People will find out and look down on me. It will affect my work life. It will affect my love life. Movies and video games make this whole subject really scary.</p> <p>People are scared because they don't know what actually happens in a doctor's office. In fact, first you will see your regular doctor who will give you a thorough physical checkup. If the doctor decides it is warranted, you will be referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist or mental health worker. The psychiatrist might prescribe medication. The psychologist or mental health worker will talk with you, and then, working together with you, try to find out the meanings behind your fears and what to do about them.</p>
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How Serious Is Paranoia? Am I the paranoid. Does this mean I'm mentally ill? I'm 33 and this started about the