

Advice from the Trenches: Stirring the pot

Dear C and Dr. B:

Liam and I have been going out for about a year. We're both people who have good jobs - as far as recreational habits, we are both very moderate social drinkers. Every once in a while, Liam would have a joint and we might share it after the car was parked for the night. While we were dating, we had a really great thing - I can be kind of hyper and oversensitive and he is a lot more easygoing. We balanced each other out. So we decided to move in together.

This was when I learned that Liam smoked pot more than I realized. In fact, the easygoing part of him owed a lot to cannabis. When I brought up my concern, he told me he had a medical need for it, but he doesn't have a medical marijuana license! He buys from a guy he's known since high school, so he says it's OK.

I have to admit this makes me sort of nervous. But am I overreacting? Like I said, I tend to overreact to a lot of stuff.

-Disturbed Debra

Dr B says:

Liam's laid back calm exterior, which can seem very attractive, is not a skill-based phenomena. It is a pharmaceutical one, and that is a serious red flag. What it most often means is that internally, a person is a larger mess, and that behavior will eventually surface. Marijuana can be used like alcohol or Xanax to suppress anxiety and caring enough to live in the moment and kick things down the line. But suppressing emotions never works for long.

A good question to ask yourself is whether your self doubt is entirely your own stuff. Is Liam emotionally present in your relationship? Mood-suppressing substances such as pot can cause people to replace emotional presence with passive aggressive tactics such as gaslighting. I admit that this is not necessarily true for people who use occasionally, or for those using medical marijuana for real medical issues. But any use of a substance in place of dealing with things here and now will become a serious problem eventually.

If you don't like things now, it won't get better later. No one can change, mature, or grow, for another person. Liam has to want to grow for himself. A relationship is only as good as the skill set both parties bring to the table. If you need to learn skills in being calm and more objective, take some dialectic behavioral therapy classes.

If you don't have personal clarity you won't be able to evaluate others well. What people say, and who they really are, are very often out of sync.

C says:

Let's not point the finger at Liam just because he's an obvious target. You've got a habit of your own, Debra. You've been depending on Liam to diffuse you just as much as he's been depending on pot to

diffuse him. It's hard to say which habit is worse. If your relationship doesn't work out, Liam can take his stash with him. But where does that leave you? Looking for another laid back guy to balance you off?

I think that you and Liam have an equal chance of getting your shit together. It all depends on whether both of you are willing to take an honest look at what's going on.

First, Liam has to wake up to some facts. If he does have a medical condition, he should not be treating himself with illegal street drugs, he should get a doctor's diagnosis and a medical marijuana license. His dealer may be a reliable friend, but his pot is questionable. At RI compassion centers, each product is clearly labeled with source, genetics, and precise CBD and THC levels. If Liam is actually serious about controlling a health problem, then getting a clear diagnosis and targeted dosage is the way to go.

Of course, Liam may just want to stay baked and avoid reality - but considering he's not a problem drinker, that is not a foregone conclusion. People who abuse substances tend to abuse alcohol as well.

As for you, Debra, you need something other than Liam to diffuse your hyperactive nerves. Therapy, meditation, martial arts, yoga, community service, or exercise are all remarkably helpful, but these are tools which require personal effort. Effort is an important part of real change. Be wary of doctors who suggest Xanax or antidepressants. These are drugs which have their own ability to generate a false laid back approach to life.

The bottom line is this: can you and Liam support each other, grow, and become the best you both can be? Or are you just embroiled in a recreational relationship that encourages weakness and co-dependence? At this point, you don't know. It's time to find out.

- Cathren Housley

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com