

Dear Darling,

I need advice about how to talk to my partner about my secret immature thoughts. because we've been together for quite awhile, i have already established a pattern of keeping them to myself. But sometimes i get pretty insecure about things, or really afraid that I'm not desirable, and then i think that sharing those things will make them more true. so I guess my question is, how can I share about my juvenile fears and insecurities without making it seem like its their job to fix my abandoned inner child? how can I ask for reassurance without soliciting promises that no one can keep? do other people figure out how to do this?

Oh sweet Pepper,

I feel you so so hard with this. It can be so scary to have these thoughts and feelings, especially when you feel like you don't have a safe container to place them in. I've been in this headspace before, and I found it to be so incredibly isolating. In my experience, my insecurities were causing me to feel distant within that relationship, and the sense that I couldn't share them with my partner, or anyone else, only contributed to that distance. It felt like I was getting farther away from the warm fuzzy feelings that kept me invested in that relationship, and I even started to wonder whether the relationship was worth the internal stresses and pressures I was putting myself through. My internal narrative was a little bit of "If I share this, my partner won't love me any more, they'll confirm all my worst fears, they'll probably just leave me" *and* and a little bit of "I bet everyone else is having loving, trusting, and communicative relationships with

everyone else and I'm just a weirdo who can't figure out how to do that." Gods, what a terrible trap to fall into, it's really so wild how we can manage to make ourselves spin out in moments like this. I can't promise that my approach will be helpful for you, but I can at least outline some of the things I did in that situation that helped me when I was feeling incapable of expressing things that were eating me alive inside.

The first thing that I did was just write everything down. Now, I'm not a journaler. I've tried in the past, and I struggle to maintain a consistent practice with it. But sometimes, the words and the thoughts just need to go SOMEWHERE. So, I opened my computer and just started typing and followed a stream-of-consciousness thread until my head and heart and fingers were done. In the process, I found that I had a LOT more to express than I thought I did. It wasn't the prettiest thing I've written, but it helped me organize the thoughts that had been previously swirling chaotically inside my brain like a stoned goldfish practicing gymnastics. I was able to identify several threads, recognize patterns, and even begin to unpack what of this mess was mine to own and be accountable for and what wasn't. I didn't share the letter with anyone, and it still made a huge difference in terms of the internal pressure I felt.

The next thing I did was talk to a friend who's witnessed me as an individual and within my relationship with this partner. This friend reminded me that my partner would probably want to know these things, especially if they're impacting me so strongly, and that they would most likely want to work with me to understand and navigate the feelings that might come up. These are things that I knew deep down, but at the time I was all wound up in my thoughts. I needed an outside perspective to point out the places where my fears were leading me to irrational thought. I was also able to come to my own realization that, if, somehow, the reassurances my friend made turned out not to be true (i.e., if my partner reacted negatively to me sharing and didn't want to work with me through it all), then that would be a sign of a relationship I don't want to be in, and that would be valuable information as well. Just to note here that, while I talked to a friend to get that outside perspective, there are other ways of doing

this as well. A therapist or counselor, a respected elder in the community, a religious or spiritual leader (if you're so inclined), any of these can fill a similar role if you're feeling like friends are hard to come by.

Finally, I reached out to someone who was able to support me in bringing these fears to my partner. For me, that was a couples' counselor, but just like above, it could also be a trusted friend or a community leader. (Side note: I love love love couples' counseling. I believe that it is so useful to have a dedicated and supported space for exploring relational dynamics, regardless of whether or not there is conflict present in the relationship. We can all always work on improving how we communicate and love each other, inside and outside of the couple form. But I digress.) My counselor helped me frame my fears so that I was owning the parts of them that were mine to own, and encouraged me to be explicit about expectations and what kind of support I wanted or didn't want. With the support of this third party, all the bravery I could muster, and just a little bit of tender-hearted crying, I shared my big scary thoughts, naming where my traumas were informing my fears and asking for grace and support in unpacking those insecurities rather than asking for reassurance that those fears were unfounded. Spending the time beforehand to organize my thoughts, own my shit, and think about what I actually wanted from my partner helped me feel like I wasn't just unloading on my partner, and working with the resources available in my community helped give me the confidence to be bold and brave.

Lo and behold, I was met with care and compassion! It turned out my friend was right and my partner did want to know that I was feeling these things! It wasn't easy for them to hear it all, but it opened the door for us to figure out solutions *together*, and that's such an important part of this. It's not your partner's responsibility to fix you (also, you're not broken, babe!), but being in a relationship is a joint project, and both of you need to be on board the ship in order to steer it where you want to go. To answer your last question, about whether everyone else has got this all figured out already, I would offer you a resounding, "I freakin' doubt it, bud!" Communication is hard! Finding ways to navigate shared existence is hard! Being a person living in community

is hard! Please remember that capitalism and patriarchy thrive on (and reinforce) isolationism, but our true strength comes in the power that we can wield when we *come together*. This is true in our relationships, just as it is true in our movements. We are stronger together. I hope this helps you, my dear Pepper. May you find your way to a life that is bursting with flavor, it awaits you.

All my love,
Darling Tonia