

My situationship wants me to accompany him to hospital – how do I say no?

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Couples Therapy

This week therapist and counsellor Cate MacKenzie talks about how to address mismatched expectations about a budding relationship



'Neither of us wanted a heavy commitment as we are both coming out of marriages. It's been a lovely few months' (Photo: Ascent/PKS Media/Getty)

By [i Team](#)

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Each week i asks experts to answer readers' questions about love, sex and relationships

I have been seeing someone for a few months and it's been a casual but intimate relationship. Neither of us wanted a heavy commitment as we are both coming out of marriages. It's been a lovely few months.

Now the person I am seeing is going through some medical issues and has asked me to go to hospital appointments with him. The truth is I don't want to but I have said yes. I have supported someone through cancer before – not my ex, a friend – and I know it sounds awful but I don't want to do that again.

Part of the reason that my marriage broke up was that I was fed up with giving a lot and feeling like I was getting very little back. This is a pattern throughout my life (I'm 54 now) and I'm trying to correct it. But how do I say no to someone I've been intimate with asking for support in such a difficult time?

He doesn't have a diagnosis yet and hopefully it will be nothing but I worry that I'm going to get pulled into looking after someone again.

Couples counsellor and psychosexual therapist Cate Mackenzie says:

Please be kind and gentle with yourself as this is a really big deal. Our biggest need as humans is to belong and so it makes sense that expressing anything that might threaten that is terrifying to do. Many of us operate from huge degrees of FOG (fear, obligation, guilt) and find it hard to do or say something that might displease another. We may have been conditioned to put others' needs before our own but done over a lifetime this leads to resentment and often the breakdown of relationships – as you have experienced in your marriage.

The only way for this relationship to have a chance is to be honest, be honest, be honest.

You need to realise you are important and your feelings and needs matter. They are not selfish or wrong. That said, he is going through a hard time and kindness is needed when approaching this conversation.

On a practical level, I would suggest bringing up the topic when you are having a nice time together. Begin by letting him know what you like about him before explaining how you see your relationship and perhaps restating any agreements you had at the beginning about it being light. Ask him how he sees the relationship too. We all have different expectations and it helps to bring these to light.

Next, could you share how you feel about going to the hospital with him.

Let him know you feel nervous to talk with him as you don't want to hurt him but equally you don't want to hide this from him as you are aware that this is what pulled you away from your husband. The more we hide our truth the more we feel removed from people. Often couples only begin to relate honestly when they come to couples counselling prepared to split. They feel they have nothing left to lose and that's when a more intimate connection can form. Take time to speak and to listen.

It may well be that you were a caregiver growing up and he may have received care growing up when he was unwell. This can be a clash as you may be care-worn and he may be anxious for reassurance and is seeking in the way he knows how. There may be other ways to express reassurance without you having to do what is not right for you.

Talk about how you might carry on dating and show support for him without going to medical appointments. Is there a way you could do that? Could you be there for him when he comes home?

It's interesting that you had to deal with this before – it suggests that this is worth tackling well now as we often find ourselves in similar situations time and time again, until we find the way to respond differently.

This could be a very important moment to do something different from what you did in your marriage and despite all your fears, this might actually make the relationship with your lover stronger.

Sometimes people push others for more support but underneath they may really want to know you care. People who have boundaries and who can say “no” in a kind way, are a gift to others because we can trust that they speak their truth. This is the opportunity being presented to you now. Speak your truth.

As told to Marianne Power