

Why Do I Lose Myself When I'm in a Relationship?

A new relationship can become so exciting and important that, without really noticing, someone begins rearranging their whole life around it.

It rarely happens all at once.

It can happen through lots of small choices. Cancelling plans with friends. Keeping an evening free just in case they want to see you. Putting aside something you wanted to do. Going along with what they want. Becoming a little less available to everyone else because you want to be completely available to this one person.

At first, none of that may feel like losing yourself. It might simply feel like falling for someone.

When Something New Feels Exciting

There is nothing unusual about wanting to spend lots of time with someone when a relationship is new.

It's exciting to feel wanted. There are new conversations, new places to explore and another person taking an interest in you and your life. Naturally, we make room for them. But sometimes, without really noticing it, making room for another person can slowly become **making less room for ourselves**.

Friends may be seen less often. Hobbies disappear. Plans become dependent on whether the other person is available. Things that once mattered to us begin moving further down the list.

And because these changes happen gradually, we may not recognise what's happening.

“I'll Keep That Evening Free... Just in Case”

One of the ways we can begin losing ourselves is by organising our lives around the possibility of another person's attention. Perhaps you don't make plans on Saturday because they *might* want to see you.

A friend asks you to do something, but you don't commit because you're waiting to find out what your partner is doing. Maybe you change your plans immediately when they become available.

Individually, these decisions can seem insignificant. But over time, something can shift.

Instead of asking:

What would I like to do?

we begin asking:

What will keep me available to them?

Our own needs haven't necessarily disappeared. We've simply become used to putting somebody else's ahead of them.

What Am I Afraid Will Happen If I'm Not Available?

Sometimes underneath all that availability is fear.

If I make myself available, perhaps they'll want to spend more time with me. If I don't disagree, perhaps things will stay good between us. If I become the person they want me to be, perhaps they'll stay.

We might not consciously think these things. Our behaviour can communicate them for us.

This can be particularly difficult because what we're doing is often an attempt to protect something that feels important.

We don't want to lose the relationship.

So we make ourselves easier to be with. More available. More accommodating.

And gradually, we can become less like ourselves.

Where Did Everybody Else Go?

Romantic relationships aren't the only relationships that can be affected.

Most of us have probably known someone who seemed to disappear when they entered a new relationship.

Friendships that were once important receive less attention. Invitations are repeatedly declined. Messages aren't answered in quite the same way.

Often, the person doesn't realise they're doing it.

They may assume their friends will understand. Perhaps this is their first serious relationship, or it has been a long time since they've met someone they feel excited about.

But relationships need nurturing too.

If we repeatedly stop showing up for friendships whenever someone new enters our life, those relationships can change.

And if the romantic relationship eventually ends, we may suddenly look around hoping to reconnect with people we've barely seen.

Sometimes they will still be there. Sometimes things won't feel quite the same.

Trying to Hold Someone Close Can Push Them Away

There's another side to losing ourselves in relationships that we don't talk about as often. We might believe that giving someone all of our time and attention will bring us closer. But the other person may not experience it that way.

They may still want to see their friends, pursue their own interests or spend time alone. If we've made the relationship the centre of our world, their need for space can begin to feel like rejection.

One person may think: *Why don't they want to spend more time with me?*

While the other is thinking: *Why can't I have some time to myself?*

What began as excitement and a desire for closeness can start to feel like pressure.

The very behaviour we hoped would protect the relationship can sometimes make it more difficult.

So Where Is the Line?

Relationships involve compromise.

We don't live exactly as we did when we were single, and nor should we expect to. We make decisions together. Sometimes we change plans. Sometimes their needs come first, and sometimes ours do.

Losing yourself is different. It might be worth becoming curious when you notice that **your needs almost always come second**.

Or when you no longer make plans without considering whether your partner might become available. Or you've stopped seeing people who once mattered to you. Or you're agreeing with things you don't really agree with. Or perhaps you realise that you're behaving differently because you're frightened that being completely yourself might make someone leave.

The question isn't whether you've changed. Relationships change us. The question is whether you still recognise yourself within that change.

Finding Yourself Again

If you've realised you've lost parts of yourself in a relationship, that doesn't mean you need to end the relationship or suddenly pull away from your partner. It can begin much more quietly.

You might ask yourself:

What did my life look like before this relationship?

What's changed since this person came into my life?

What do I miss?

When I'm making plans now, whose needs do I think about first?

What do I imagine might happen if I'm not always available?

And perhaps one of the most useful questions:

What parts of my life still feel like mine?

You may discover that more of you is still there than you realised. The friend you haven't seen for a while. The class you stopped attending. The Saturday morning routine you loved.

The interests that belonged entirely to you. You don't have to reclaim everything at once. Perhaps you simply begin with one.

 **Therapist's Reflection:** We don't usually lose ourselves in relationships through one enormous decision. **It happens in little choices.** One cancelled plan. One evening kept free just in case. One opinion we don't express. One more occasion when somebody else's needs automatically come before our own.

And often those choices come from a very understandable place: we have found someone who feels important to us, and we don't want to lose them. But a healthy relationship doesn't require us to become less of ourselves in order to keep somebody else.

There should still be room for your friendships. Your interests. Your opinions. Your plans. Your time.

You.

Because if someone has to become less like themselves to keep a relationship, it may be worth asking what they're working so hard to hold onto.

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