

Hi I'm Alvean Lyons
and I'm Doug Weiss and welcome to Love Life.

Alvean

OK so I get this from a few of our listeners and I hear a lot quite frankly even beyond that. It's about talking to friends and family about the issues that you have in your relationship, is it appropriate to do so? Should you do so will it cause problems later if you do it? I mean what if I'm close to them, can't I just tell them about all the things about it? Is it not OK? What do you really think about that? So, we're asking that question today on the show, can your friends and family be your counselor. What do you think about that?

Doug

I don't even need to take a beat, the answer is categorically no.
But I want to be very careful in characterizing my response first. The phrase that you used is counselor. As opposed to sympathizer or empathizer or any of a number of other roles that someone could play this is not to say that it's inappropriate to confide in other people the things that are on your heart. But to look to them for counsel, for specific advice about what you should do, my answer is never ever do that and here's why folks. You may think that people who are social workers or relationship counsellors or psychiatrists or psychologists are just people who can sit down and listen and give you advice. Actually they are trained professionals and actually there's a lot to that training. It's not superficial and beyond just the training that they have are years of experience and watching what happens. How things play out in relationships. This is not something which you should attempt to do with an amateur. It would be akin, if I can put it that way, to going to your friend the auto mechanic and saying, hey look you're good with your hands I need surgery, can you help?.

Do not try this at home, this is not in any sense a D.I.Y. field. Counselors are counselors. If you want professional help, if you want professional assistance in your life or guidance, whether that is spiritual counseling seek out your pastor, or a pastoral counselor or someone who is trained to deal with emotional and psychological issues then seek out a professional. If you want commiserations, if you want someone to go hey I know it's tough Pal I care about you. I hear you. Or just someone to listen to you then find somebody in your family or a friend. I would recommend friends over family, and I'll come back to that later but I think that that's perfectly appropriate. Just don't change the relationship, because you put a burden on someone when you ask them to act in the role of your counselor. Your friendship will change. They will now know things about you that you may wish in retrospect you hadn't told them. They will feel compelled if they are good friends to try to support you, which may prompt their taking sides..... not a good thing. if it's a multiple relationship where you and your significant other are involved with that friend or family member and perhaps their significant other, it will change the tenor of your relationship and not necessarily in a positive way.

If you turn a friend into a counselor and I have had this happen to me, and I want to say that I have had a few friends over the years who made me into their counselors. Now as I actually have had some training, and I don't represent myself as a counsellor, I don't make a living at it and I don't want our listeners to think that that's the case. But I have enough of a professional background to have high regard for what Alvean and others who do practice do for a living. And this is not a hobby. It's a profession, and I have reluctantly allowed myself out of friendship on a very few occasions to play that role.

Once you're committed, you're in forever and you better accept that reality. You can't disengage you can't stop being a counsellor once you've started. But unlike a professional counselor whose goal it is always to try and bring you to a place of resolution..... Believe me folks I know this is a fantasy that people think that professionals want to just keep you metaphorically lying on the couch so they can collect their hourly fee. In fact if anything we want you out of there sooner rather than later.

But you can't do that with a friend you can't get them off the couch unfortunately and that means that your ability to continue to help them becomes a point of diminishing return because they can at the click of a

phone, Text or a phone call and enlist you in the latest part of their drama.

And if you love them you really care about their welfare the best that you can do for them is be truthful even if it's hard and be prepared for it to change your relationship or potentially in the relationship with them as a friend because if you're doing your job as a counsellor. Then you have to be committed to doing what is right for them and that isn't always telling them what they want to hear. So my dividing line..... that was a long winded answer is If you want to be a friend be a friend, want to be a family member be a family member if you're a counsellor and you're trained to do it, be a counsellor but don't mix these roles.

Alvaen

I think that it is very muddy water. I think we have to be very careful about those things because when.. to a point that you were alluding to in terms of the change that happens in our relationship it's hard for some body who loves you to know all of the intimate details of what is going wrong inside of a relationship and not look at the person that you may continue to love and continue to be in relationship with differently. See if you're going to tell your family or your very very good friends about the ugliest parts of your relationship do understand that the best time to tell them is if you're planning to end the relationship. If it's really over and you want them to be the accountability partner for why you need to leave him or her alone it's a great time to tell them because your family is going to be team move on. But if you are planning to stay in that relationship or if you're not even sure whether you want to stay or you want to go I would be very cautious about telling the people that you love while you're in the midst of that sort of turmoil. And I'm not talking about support as you referenced, I'm not talking about some comforts, just basic comforts but I'm talking about when you start to get into the kinds of details that typically should happen in a therapeutic environment, a counselling environment, a pastoral environment, when you start to get into some of those things it is very difficult for people to put that in a box on a shelf far away. When the two of you are all excited again and you're all in love with each other again and especially if this thing is cyclical, people are always waiting for it to fall apart yet again. So it makes it hard to be objective in the relationship, it makes it hard to be really supportive of the relationship when all of the ugly ugly dirt is inside of the relationship. So I really say proceed with caution. The other thing that I will say is this. Consider your counsel also. If you're going to someone whose relationship is a mess, about your relationship I want you to think about that like a cup with dirty water.

If I am thirsty and you have a cup with dirty water at your best and no matter how much you love me, when you try to quench my thirst all you can offer me is dirty water; not because you don't love me but it's because it's all you've got in your cup. So if you're going to go to somebody for counsel make sure that your counsel at least is clean water. Consider the fruit of the tree that you are biting from because we don't intend to share our pains, we don't intend to share our poisons but we can only pour out of the abundance of who we are and what our experiences are. So part of the reason why professional assistance and support is valuable and should not come with any kind of stigma associated is the fact that those individuals are trained to be separate, apart and objective and to only offer what is going to be in the best interest of the individual and their relationship as a whole and not merely to pour out of the substance of their personal perspective or their personal issues. That's my thing

Doug

I have a friend who's a pastoral counsellor and I've seen him on a professional basis and it's interesting because we we have an unstated way a lot of delineation, an absolute line of delineation. We can be friendly outside of our professional relationship... when I saw him the first time in the in the wake of the death of my wife I needed grief counselor. And he was gracious and willing to do that, but in counseling we were not acting as friends. I was his client and I understood that and he understood that and never the twain shall meet It doesn't mean that when I run into him at church or on the street that we're not friends, we are, and to deny that would be as wrong as trying to bring the friendship into the counseling.

I think that this this is a tempting thing to do to turn to people that we know and who know us and who think well of us and turn them into our professionals. And I think that that's just not fair to them, it's not fair to you to do that, to lean on them for support sure. Look to people to care about you and give you emotional

support. But avoid making them into your professional counselor. Let your friends be your friends and your family be your family then let your counselor be your counselor.

Alvean

Indeed Words to live by

Doug

Another episode of Love Life and we hope that you've enjoyed it. We will be back next week with another interesting topic, and I know because I actually think about your shows ,, how does he know.

We hope you've enjoyed this show and if you'd like to comment on it or give us a suggestion for another show please write to us alvean@lovelife.digital or doug@lovelife.digital.

We want to thank you Kamaria our producer, Todd our recording engineer... this is the love life family and it really is. I mean this, these shows are not something that any one of us could do on our own it is very much that I want to say beyond team effort, family effort. Thank you folks and see you next week.