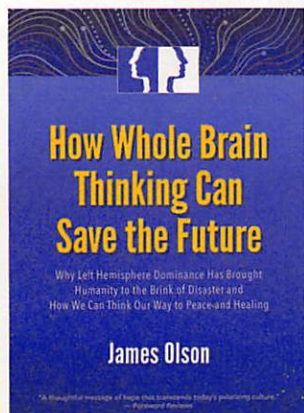


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TIME FOR TRUST

HOW CAN I KNOW when to trust someone romantically, especially when the person shows interest with words but not necessarily through actions? My friend calls or messages several times a day, then communicates nothing for days because, he says, he is busy. Then I learn that he has been flirty with others; when I ask, he says he was just being

kind. How do I find the balance between not being naive and not overreacting? Are my concerns somehow connected to my attachment style?

YOUR ATTACHMENT style is not the issue. The bedrock of all relationships is trust, but it isn't a commodity that you either have or you don't have; there's no one day when you wake up knowing you have it. Trust builds slowly. It is what allows people to gradually reveal to each other the deepest recesses of their hearts and minds, which keeps love ever fresh.

With trust, there is no finish line. But there is a starting line: Trust hinges on the concordance of words and actions. In the beginning, trust is built on two people following through on small promises and commitments—to be in touch in some way. Gradually, those commitments reach deeper into needs and desires as two people begin to open up to each other, revealing the more guarded facets of their nature. But always, it's the concordance of actions and words—spoken aloud or not, always in some way mutually agreed on—that fosters trust. As partners learn that the other values them, they come to expect that their partner has their back, seeks to protect their private revelations, even actively fosters their well-being. That's the advanced stage of trust. And it is in part what makes love feel like the most liberating experience on earth.

You find yourself at the beginning of something—not quite a relationship yet, but an intermittent conversation. It's obviously disappointing to learn that your friend is flirty with others, because it suggests that his interest level in you is not

as great as yours in him. But whoa, slow down—you're jumping the gun emotionally. This is why dating—actually spending time together—is so important; it is a process of determining whether a person of interest to you is not only someone you want to trust but can trust.

You have some expectations for a relationship, but you need to find out, subtly, whether they are shared. This is always the case at the beginning. It's far too early to ask about your relationship status, but it isn't too early to poke around conversationally about how your friend sees himself now and in the future, what his goals are, and where a relationship might fit in his life. These are the kinds of things friends commonly talk about. And, in fact, it is through conversations that two people learn whether they share values and have compatible aspirations—whether a relationship is

even worth pursuing. And here's the funny thing: These conversations themselves are the means of building bonds of affection.

Whether or not your friend is flirty, your questions about his behavior with others come across as attempts to control his actions. It is human nature to resist such attempts. It's time to stop asking him about what he does with others and to start talking about what he wants for himself. And make sure there's more than texting. Doing things together, having fun together—that's what builds interest between two people and paves the way for emotional investment and, yes, trust.

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