

Sex, Men, Friends, Family *Heart & Soul*

The Rules of Long-Distance Relationships

How to cope when the man you love lives hundreds (or thousands) of miles away. By Julia Scirrotto

Clarify your status

Distance is never easy – especially at this time of year, when everyone seems to be canoodling under the mistletoe – so before you sign up to the nights alone and skyrocketing travel expenses that the average long-distance relationship entails, make sure you and your partner are on the same page commitment-wise. ‘Defining things will eliminate some of the anxiety distance can breed,’ says Dr Jonathan Alpert, a psychotherapist and advice columnist.

Make sure talk is cheap

Your phone is now the third wheel in your relationship, so it’s time to upgrade your mobile contract. Use those extra minutes to plan regular phone dates, ideally when you can both tune out everything else. ‘These calls need to be scheduled so you can expect and look forward to them,’ says psychologist Dr Craig Malkin. That structure will keep you present in each other’s daily lives despite the physical separation.

Invest in pretty stationery...

Make like history’s greatest lovers and put pen to paper – once a week if possible – to fill the intimacy gaps left by electronic communication. ‘Words on a screen are so impersonal compared with seeing your partner’s handwriting and holding the piece of paper they were holding not too long ago,’ explains Caroline Tiger, author

of *The Long-Distance Relationship Guide* (£8.99, Quirk Books). Unlike pounding out BlackBerry messages on your lunch break, letter-writing forces you to engage on a deeper level – one that comes closer to pillow talk than your average email.

...and fantastic lingerie

When you’re apart, bring your sex drive out of hibernation by treating yourself to some gloriously impractical underwear to be worn only when you see each other. Obviously he’ll appreciate the effort and, more importantly, it will keep *you* focused on the physical side of your relationship and jump-start the sexual tension before you’re suddenly standing face to face.

Enjoy the freedom (quietly)

Of course you’d rather be in the same post-code, but until that’s an option, don’t ignore the upsides of the (sort of) single life. ‘People often lose a part of their individuality in a relationship, so you now have an opportunity to pursue your own interests,’ explains Dr Alpert. Whether that means signing up for French lessons or simply getting to watch all the chick flicks on Film4, try to appreciate the fact that – for now at least – your time is your own. Just be sure to use some of that time to remember why you’re in this situation: because he’s the only one on the planet who’ll do. ■



How often do you see your man?



LORI-JEAN PATTERSON
29, chemist

‘Daily, but I’m often away for work. It’s healthy to have space.’



JESSICA CURRY
19, student

‘Only at the weekends. I’m at uni and he works on a farm – my phone bills are huge.’



CLAIRE PAGE
24, PR officer

‘He’s in the army and can be away for weeks, so when he’s around I’m with him 24/7.’