It's over, but she's broke, pregnant; he's hurt by her aloofness

Chicago Sun-Times, Jan 26, 2005 by Ellie Tesher

DEAR ELLIE: I was the victim of a sexual assault a few months ago. It resulted in severe anxiety, many trips to the hospital to be tested for sexually transmitted disease and counseling. I also had to take a leave of absence from work and send my kids to live with my ex-husband.

I'm now in a five-month relationship with a guy who started seeing me a few weeks before the attack. He's trying to be supportive, and acting like my rape happened to him, too. He's protective of me, watching how men behave around me, if they come on to me or scare me (I'm attractive, and this happens often).

Since my rape, we once had unprotected sex. I said we shouldn't continue to do so until I get the results from my tests for sexually transmitted disease. He said we both took a chance with his life, and he occasionally brings it up when he's upset. So I've provided him with my negative AIDS test results at six weeks. I urged him to get tested himself.

I discovered that he's also upset that I slept at a guy friend's house when I felt ill.

Is my relationship going to fail because I was raped? I'm fond of this guy and unsure if I'm hurting him with this issue. Or is he trying to help me not to be so trusting?

Should I even be dating someone right now?

SCARED BUT NOT ALONE

DEAR SCARED: Your most crucial need is continued counseling. You're focused on this still-young relationship, yet there are other important matters, such as dealing with your children again and feeling secure and confident in yourself without this man's protective policing.

Therapist Marilyn Barnicke Belleghem says the current dynamic can lead to his having power over you, when you need to regain your personal power and get your life back on track. "His attitude as she describes it is indicative of someone wanting the attention

focused on him. It's also indicative of a controller. She should be fending off unwanted sexual attentions, not relying on him." Take time for yourself, and for your own healing.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline, (800) 799-7233, can help you find crisis counseling, safety planning, emotional support, referrals for shelters and legal services.

Controlling People: How to Recognize, Understand and Deal With People Who Try to Control You by Patricia Evans gives advice on getting free of controlling types.

Tip of the Day: When a relationship ends, meeting responsibilities is part of winding down, not a favor.

Ellie's column runs Monday through Friday. Send e-mail to askellie@suntimes.com.

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