



Montclair Local's Ask Task: Help. #metoo has triggered me



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By ALLISON TASK

For Montclair Local

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Author's note: The two questions below are compilations of questions I've received recently. Enough people have asked variants of these questions that I wanted to dedicate a column to them, using the "Ask Task" format.

Dear Allison,

All this talk of sexual assault and harassment. ... I'm just sick of it. Disgusted. It's triggered me, it's triggered all my friends, and I'm having a hard time getting comfortable, being physical and having sex with my partner. How long is it going to take to get over this?

— #metoo

#metoo Sister,

Given the stories that we've been confronted by recently, from Louis C.K.'s invite-only masturbation performances, or Matt Lauer's secret door-lock button, of course you're disturbed. These images are vivid and visceral, and once shared, we can't un-see them. They involve sex and intimacy, power and abuse, so it can be hard to block these ideas when we return to our own sex lives.

Researchers have studied the impact of linking images for people. In one study, subjects were shown images of bananas followed by images of vomit. Banana, vomit. Banana, vomit. The two became linked in the brain. Then, the next day, they asked subjects if they'd like a banana. The banana was now linked with the idea of vomit, and the subjects declined.

Now we all have images of highly visible people that are forever linked to a different image, a personal and private image and as a result our own intimate moments are affected.

First, let's return to your question: "How long is it going to take me to get over this?" First, acknowledge that this is the brain linking the two concepts. Understand what's going on.

Second. You say that you are triggered. Do you have a #metoo experience? If you have been or are in a situation of sexual harassment or assault, can you speak with a professional? This is a heavy load; get appropriate help and guidance.

Third. If sex is too difficult right now, what are other paths to intimacy with your partner? First, let's get this out in the open and talk about #metoo. What is your experience, and what are their experiences? If you're in a heterosexual relationship, this will affect each of you. Find the connection in this, not the divide. If you're in a same-sex couple, also have the conversation. Have this conversation to build connection, intimacy; find strength in vulnerability.

Don't push sex just yet. If you can, lay together, hold hands, read and talk. Sex will be there, when you are ready. You're in an intense time now, so the ways you've connected in the past may not be the ways to connect right now. Use this time of challenge to reach out and connect in different ways.

Dear Allison,

How can my husband and I get away without our kids? We have four, ages 2 to 8. No local family who can help. Is it even possible?

— We Want Our Couple Bubble Back

Couple Bubble,

First, I'd like to commend you on recognizing that you and your husband need to get away by yourselves. While self-care is all the rage, couple-care is also critically important.

There's an old saying when it comes to eating healthy food, "Pay the butcher or pay the doctor." When I think about the expense of child care while getting solo time with my husband, whether it's date night or a night away, I rationalize, "Pay the sitter or pay the therapist."

So congratulations to you for recognizing that you want and need couple time. Fabulous. As soon as that is an established priority, the rest is just working out logistics. To answer your second question first, a resounding YES, it's possible. YES it's necessary. Now it's just a question of how. So let's brainstorm.

Your 8-year-old is on the cusp of 9, which is the age at which he or she can fly independently to ... some far-away relatives you can send him or her to visit. You mentioned that you don't have local relatives; do you have far-away friends or relatives who could handle your "big kid" for a couple of days?

Now you're down to three; let's divide and conquer. If you have a regular babysitter; might he or she be open to an overnight stay? If that person can quarterback the weekend, and organize play dates, and you supplement with another babysitter in addition here and there, you're closer to making this possible. It ain't cheap, but it works.

Alternatively, you can weekend swap with friends, ideally friends who have a smaller family (it can be a lot of fun for only children to have a friend visit for an entire weekend). If they host your child for the weekend; you can reciprocate another time.

I'm just getting started with the brainstorming; I'll let you take it from here. You know what you want, and how important it is. The rest is just logistics.