

# My girlfriend is always having to rescue her adult children and it's affecting our partnership

If I try to talk to her about it, she just tells me to leave, but I love and adore her. Annalisa Barbieri advises a reader

**Annalisa Barbieri**

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**I have been in a relationship for about two years with a woman I love and adore, and we have lived together for a year. I am 30, but there is a big age gap between us. She has four adult children who - whether by circumstance or choice - have problems running their own lives. She is constantly running to their rescue, and it is taking a big toll on our relationship.**

**I knew when I got into a relationship with someone with children, my needs would never come first, and that's fine. But sometimes I want to scream, "I exist! Here I am!" But how can I expect her time and attention when she has a daughter who had a miscarriage? Or her other daughter who has two children and an abusive boyfriend?**

**You are going to tell me to talk to my partner, but I can't. Every time I bring it up, she goes on the offensive, saying: "If you're so unhappy, just leave." I feel as if I am helping pick up the pieces of her children's lives instead of living my own. Please help.**

What was really interesting about your letter is that, when I first read it, I thought you were being a bit selfish. How could you complain about not having your partner's attention when one of her daughters had had a miscarriage and the other is in an abusive relationship? But then, unusually, I asked you for more information and, once I had more details (which I cannot publish), I realised that, far from being selfish, you are actually a bit of a saint for putting up with your girlfriend's behaviour for this long. This skewing of information to your detriment is telling.

I consulted Alison O'Mahony, a psychotherapist ([aft.org.uk](http://aft.org.uk)) who specialises in blended families, and she read both your letters. When we compared our notes, the very first thing we had both written was, "Why stay?" You said in your longer, second letter to me that, when it's good, "it's wonderful", and I suspect that is what makes you cling on. O'Mahony thinks your girlfriend must have "a redeeming feature, otherwise why put up with it?"

I would have liked to have known more about the wonderful bits, because the way your girlfriend talks to you and treats you is not loving at all. That is not love. I felt there were elements of abusive behaviour (from her to you) described in your letter and the hanging on for the good bits is rather worrying, because that is no way to live.

O'Mahony asks, "What is allowing you to stay around and be spoken to and treated like that?"

You mention very little of yourself, your family or friends, or your upbringing. And where you do mention yourself, it is in passing, yet, if I have understood things correctly, your girlfriend has moved her daughter and her grandchildren into your home without consulting you, and told you that you can, basically, take it or leave it. It sounds as if you have put your life, and job, on hold, yet your girlfriend says she “doesn’t need you anyway”.

I felt you were like a lens through which I viewed everyone else’s life. What about *you*? What support do *you* have? Family, friends, work colleagues? You mentioned you had no one else to talk to about this and I wonder why that is. Is there no one else, or do you feel ashamed? I do hope you are able to bolster your own self-esteem in some way, outside this relationship.

What was your upbringing like? What is it about this woman that so hooks you? What does it tap into? I am all for supporting one’s partner and children but, as O’Mahony says, “Where is the partner of the daughter who had the miscarriage? Where is the father(s) of these children [ie your girlfriend’s ex or exes]? Why is your girlfriend constantly playing the rescuer? [to her children]”.

I think it is very convenient for your girlfriend to just say, “If you don’t like it, you can leave” - or variations on that theme - every time you dare to voice concern or upset. It totally shuts you down and doesn’t invite a dialogue; is this how you want to be spoken to for the rest of your life? How would you feel if you saw her talking to someone else? Probably not overly impressed, and yet you take it.

Nothing in your letter made me feel your safety was compromised - otherwise I would not recommend this course of action. But if you do feel you want to make this work, then I would suggest that, perhaps during the “wonderful times” you talk about when things aren’t so great, and how you feel. It is tempting to want to talk straight after an argument, but this isn’t usually the best time. So when things are good, try asking your girlfriend how she would feel if someone spoke to her children in the way she does to you.

This isn’t actually about your girlfriend having children whom she is putting before you - I would understand that. This is about your girlfriend treating you badly. I can’t tell you what to do, but I would ask you to think very carefully if the bits that are wonderful, where you love and adore your partner, are worth the segregation and abuse you get at other times.

### **Your problems solved**

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