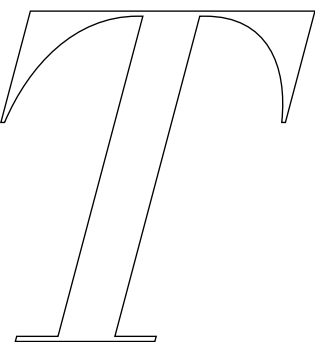


EMBRACE HIS INNER FROG

His annoying habits and behaviour will inevitably drive you round the bend, but try to make peace with his inner frog because there's no such thing as the perfect Prince Charming. By Carla Calitz





he much-loved fairy tale *The Frog Prince* sees a spoilt princess magically transforming a common frog into a handsome prince with a single kiss. Of course, that's the modern romantic retelling.... In the original version by the

Brothers Grimm the spiteful princess hurls the common frog against a wall before he transforms into Prince Charming. But what both versions fail to mention is that although the prince loses his external trappings, he never really gets rid of his inner frog.

Dealing with your man's inner frog is undoubtedly one of the most annoying challenges you'll face in your relationship – and it's a continual one unfortunately. Whether it's his infuriating inability to pick up the bath mat, his refusal to plan ahead, his preference for wearing the same jeans for an entire week or his empty promises to get home early from a boys' night out, you may well find yourself wishing you could throw him against a wall.

But unless you learn to live with his inner frog rather than your perceived ideal of a Prince Charming, you may find yourself not only alone but also empty and unhappy.

MEET MY FROG

Charmaine*, 26, a personal assistant from Pretoria, is completely in love with her boyfriend but admits that his inner frog drives her up the wall. 'I'm an extremely punctual person and he's not at all. He also procrastinates, which drives me insane. I try so hard not to be "the nagging girlfriend" but he occasionally makes it impossible. I have to ask him 10 times to wash the car or the dog, or even to make me a cup of coffee. Being well groomed is very important to me but I have to beg him to cut his hair or to shave. Yet I have to be perfectly presented at all times. Then there's his obsession with soccer – I don't know what I'm going to do when the World Cup starts.'

Joanne*, 27, a copywriter from Johannesburg, is considering leaving her boyfriend because of his inner-frog behaviour. 'We had the perfect relationship at first – I was so in love with him and we did everything together. But two years later it feels as though we might as well not be together. Every weekend he's off with the boys playing cricket, while I sit at home waiting for him. He's also absolutely useless in our home – he doesn't like doing the dishes or tidying up after himself. I have to pressurise him to do anything and when he does do it, he doesn't do it properly. He also only organises things at the last minute, which drives me mad. I worry that he doesn't have enough drive – I want kids but I worry that he won't be able to provide for them. It just doesn't feel like we're on the same page.'

YOU'RE SO ANNOYING!

As a relationship progresses, each partner becomes more comfortable and allows more of themselves to shine through, says Thuraisha Moodley, a Johannesburg clinical psychologist. 'Your boyfriend might start to feel comfortable enough to allow his stereotypical male behaviours, such as untidiness and disorganisation, to come to the fore,' she says.

Each relationship certainly has its own unique set of irritants and it's important to remember that your boyfriend isn't the only one with annoying habits and behaviours, says Hanlie Raath, a Johannesburg psychotherapist and author of *The New Paradise: Making Intimacy Real* (Double Storey). 'What annoys men the most is their partners' nagging and shaming. We have a

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tendency to remember details and when we're locked into a victim mentality we complain and feel hard done by. This creates feelings of guilt and helplessness in men.' When women are angry, says Raath, they tend to shame men by adding up their faults and building a case against them, saying things such as 'I wish you'd grow up' which make them feel they have to defend their characters.

When dealing with his annoying behaviour, rather talk openly and honestly – without blame or judgment – about the effect it has on you. 'Be gentle when discussing it and ensure you don't break him down or try to put him on a guilt trip. Use "I" language and say, "I feel this when you do that" and then discuss the effect it has on you,' says Raath.

Just remember that he can choose whether or not to heed your need. 'What you're essentially doing is handing the responsibility over to him and affirming to yourself that "whatever will be, will be,"' says Moodley. 'This will give you a healthy sense of control – you will have done the best you can, knowing that you can't control people or situations fully.'

The key to a healthy relationship is that both partners have the space and safety to blossom, because we all have shortcomings, fears, anxieties and sensitivities. 'When we can honestly accept this fact, both in ourselves and in our partners, then we can take a more balanced approach in dealing with each other's limitations. Rather replace "blaming" with encouragement, support and love,' says Moodley.

Charmaine believes her relationship has worked precisely because her boyfriend accepts her flaws. 'I rarely do wrong in his eyes – he's fixated only on the good,' she says. 'Because he is so accepting of me, it makes me do my best not to retaliate during his inner-frog moments. I seldom complain about his annoying behaviour either, because I don't want to dwell on the bad. Instead I do my best to accept him as he is.'

PRINCE CHARMING?

It's important to embrace your partner's inner frog and to realise there's no such thing as the 'perfect Prince Charming'. ▶

