What’s the best way to approach a lover about his or her personal hygiene without hurting that person’s feelings?

Dorothy Horton, PsyD, answers your questions in her latest Ask Doctor Dee column.

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Q: What’s the best way to approach a lover about his or her personal hygiene without hurting that person’s feelings?

A: Having a discussion about personal hygiene with a loved one is never easy. First, consider your lover’s personal habits. Is this a one-time offense, or is his or her lack of hygiene a chronic issue?

Ask your lover if there is something wrong. Maybe your partner is falling into a depression, or maybe the offensive smells—body odor or bad breath, for example—signal a serious health condition. If your partner smells bad because he or she is wearing unclean clothing, bypassing a shower after playing sports, or simply becoming sweaty, then bring up the subject in a way that says you care.

If the problem is chronic and you decide to discuss the matter, make sure you and your partner are in a private setting. When you approach the issue, be diplomatic, sensitive and understanding, but be candid. Share with your partner that you’re concerned because proper personal hygiene can prevent the transmission of germs that cause sickness.

You can also share with your partner that good personal hygiene is important because you love being intimate with him or her. Be playful and take showers or baths together. Compliment your partner on his or her appearance. All these tactics should help make your partner feel loved and appreciated—and more aware and concerned about their hygiene.

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