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**Title: Living together requires work and commitment**

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Your overnight bag stuffed with mismatched clothes, leaky toiletries and random shoes has gotten way old. Now that your Partner has bought a bigger pad, you both are ready to toss your loot behind one door. Cohabiting seems the perfect solution to the constant need for runs to Walgreens for products you forgot at your place. You think moving in together would not only save wasted energy but also cold, hard cash. Despite your mother's constant "why buy the cow if you can get the milk for free?" whispers, you figure you're both adults. You can make your own decisions and even your own bed; both seem fair skills for just this sort of situation. Living together just doesn't seem as big of a deal to you. After all, everyone needs a little sin in their lives, so why not live in it?

First, define the stage of your relationship. Make sure you both have the same goals. Are you guys ready for the increased intensity that comes along with cohabiting, or are you just sick of the schleping back and forth? One half of a cohabiting couple recently confessed that living together was the "ultimate litmus test" of his relationship. He concluded that if he could live with his girlfriend and she doesn't turn out to be "psycho," he would PROBABLY marry her. Problem: Upon further questioning about what he would do if he found out she wasn't psycho but a freak of a slob or worse--a Lysol nazi--he said he'd break up with her. Wrong answer, cowboy. Where's the commitment? Where's the work?

And therein lies the main issue. Without solid plans for the future, bailing is easy. Living together is putting yourselves in a married situation without the dedication or tools that come with true readiness for a lifetime together. Even the perm-a-grinned newlyweds with all their sick glow have issues with it at first. The transition to living together isn't an easy one for anyone.

Using financial reasons to justify shacking up semi-permanent style is the greatest offense of all. It says nothing about your relationship and more about your fast need to remedy a material situation. Respect the relationship by treating it as a higher investment rather than an easy fix.

Living together before you're ready can be taxing. It doesn't allow for much personal space. And it becomes easy to confuse understanding each other's house roles with an actual understanding of each other. Looking at the same mug when you go to bed and then when you wake up and then again when you go to sleep can be tiring. Intensity shifts.

Being in bed together so often would seem to light up your sex life. Yes, you can attain a happy medium, but the mundane is always a part of this life together. It's a life where talking dirty now involves some mention of Pine-sol and getting on all fours simply means there's a toilet begging for a scrubbing. Without real commitment, it's difficult to

stick that out. On the other hand, if you do feel you are at the level where you're connected enough that you're ready for living together, why not get engaged? Define your relationship based on your vision of the future instead of the convenience of today.

If you choose to live together, prepare to work. It's essential to make date nights, get out of the house, flirt, seduce and dress up for each other. Keep it special. This is your Partner, not another cushion on the couch. Get away from the TV and out of your college sweats, pit-stained T's and underthings missing vital parts. Make it important. Build a home together.

Without the proper tools and foundation, any home is on shaky ground.

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