

### Seeing dogs gives me some paws for thought – terror! How can I get over this awful phobia?

THERE'S something that is causing me big problems and I hope you don't think I'm being silly writing to you.

I know you're a great animal lover and love dogs and cats and do a lot of work with various animal shelters around Dublin.

My problem is I'm terrified of dogs, to the point where I'm sometimes afraid to leave my home in case I meet a dog on the street. Please help me!

Tessa, Crumlin

**MARY SAYS:** YES, you're right – I love my cats and dogs and have had nothing but great times with the various animals that I have had all my life.

You, on the other hand, sound like you have had bad experiences with animals in the past and this is causing you a lot of distress.

You don't say in your letter, but I wonder can you remember a particular incident that started your fears?

Sometimes our fears start with something specific, but more often than not these fears can be buried in our subconscious.

It's possible that as a child a dog jumped up to you in a greeting but, as a child, you saw it as an attack.

Even the sound of barking to a small child can be very frightening and you may have lived in an area with loud barking dogs.



Who could be afraid of this little guy? A reader writing in from Crumlin – just one of many people who are terrified of dogs of all shapes and sizes...

The reality is that, in my experience, dogs are friendly, loyal and great companions – we need to try and get you to see them in the same way.

Thousands of people suffer from phobias or irrational fears, such as a fear of flying, fear of spiders, fear of snakes and so on, and in the majority of cases these phobias can be rectified with specialised counselling.

I suggest talking to your GP and asking to be put in touch with a phobia specialist. Break the hold that this phobia has on you and before you know it you'll be wanting to own a dog of your own!

### My boyfriend (16) is acting really weird lately. What should I do?

I'M REALLY worried about my boyfriend. We're both 16 and have been together for just over two years.

Recently he's been acting very strangely. He makes excuses for not seeing me and seems to spend all his time with his friends.

When we do see each other, he is moody and always snapping at me. Please can you help me!

Tanya, Tallaght

**MARY SAYS:** I CAN really feel the hurt in your letter. You obviously feel deeply for this boy and must be beside yourself with worry.

You're both very young and it's great to see young love. However, there are some alarm bells ringing.

First of all, girls generally mature much faster than boys and, at 16, he may not have the same emotional development or maturity that you



Is there something on your mind? Mary Byrne is delighted to offer her advice to Dublin Gazette readers; email her today at [marybyrne@dublingazette.com](mailto:marybyrne@dublingazette.com)

feel – everything for him may be “a bit of a laugh” and he won't be able to understand your feelings.

The other thing to remember is that adolescence in boys can be very scary for them. Being moody, morose, bad tempered ... these are all classic symptoms of male puberty.

I don't think you've a huge amount to worry about as he will grow up over the next few months and you'll see a different boy.

The dilemma is, are you prepared to wait and are you prepared to see what kind of young man he becomes?

Sometimes emotions can blind us from the reality, especially about those who

we're involved with.

I'd suggest a break for a few months – stay in touch, by all means, but give him a chance to grow up at his own pace, and let him see what he is missing in not having you around.

### I'm gay, but find it very hard to tell my parents because I know they just won't understand.

I'M A gay guy who is terrified of 'coming out' as I know my parents just wouldn't understand.

My mum adores me and keeps asking me when I am going to find a “nice girl and settle

down” and I don't want to shatter her dreams of being a grandmother one day.

I sometimes wonder whether my life is worth living any more.

John, Leixlip

**MARY SAYS:** THE first thing I need to say to you is that your life is most certainly worth living.

You are a wonderful, unique human being with much to offer the world.

Whilst Ireland has moved on so much over the past few years, and our society has become much more inclusive, I can fully understand your fears as the old views will not disappear overnight.

John, you are unique, you are who you are, and to live in denial of that will slowly shrivel you up and you will die emotionally.

Your parents brought you into this world and from the day you were born your mother has loved you unconditionally.

You might not see that, but let me assure you as a mother that she has.

Your biggest fear right now is the fear of being rejected by your parents and to tell them that you are

gay opens the door to them rejecting you.

Telling them will be the hardest thing you have ever done, but you have to face your fears.

Trust in the fact that their love is unconditional. Yes, it may take a little time for them to become accustomed to the fact, but a fact it is, and over time they will continue to show you the love they have shown you in your life, to date.

Be brave, be honest, but above all, be yourself.

## REMINDER

Mary needs you to contact her by noon on Monday, so don't delay – email your problem straight over to Dear Mary at Dublin Gazette today!