

Shrinkwrap: When Are You Exclusive?



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Taking Your Relationship to the Next Level

From recent reports it seems that actors Michelle Williams and Jason Segel have quietly crossed that line between playing with the idea of being exclusive and committing to being a couple.

At a recent premiere party to celebrate Segel's film *The Five-Year Engagement*, they were seen holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes. They are both known for taking their time when it comes to romance. It raises the question, how does a hopeful pair get from one point to the next? When do you actually become an exclusive couple?

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One of my patients was pondering this recently, and she asked me about when it's appropriate to have the conversation and negotiate the terms of becoming a committed couple. I told her that in order to gauge that, you want to look at what is going on between the two of you.

Being exclusive is the exciting hill everyone wants to get over in a new, promising relationship. And there will be definite signs that you are successfully making that climb. One example might be if you begin to refer to each other, and to introduce each other, as boyfriend and girlfriend. Other clues are when you start to show your affection in public by holding hands and touching, making the statement that you belong together, or you start to say, "I love you." And the best indication of all is that you no longer want to date other people, or even leave that door open for the possibility. When it becomes clear that you are focusing your energy and heart on that one person, and that it is a mutual choice, that is a good time to check in to determine if you are now being exclusive.

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Once you decide you are each other's one and only, you will be able to usher in the emotional and sexual trust and safety that most people crave. You want "the talk" my patient was referring to, and even more important, the move toward steady dating, to be an acknowledgment of what is already happening between the two of you rather than a negotiation to put something in place, just as it seems to be for Williams and Segel.