

4 Best Practices for Talking to Your Date



By Carl Alasko, PhD

Dating is a complicated, difficult and anxious process – we can't all be contestants on *The Bachelor* with glamorous, network-funded dates and fairy tale endings. And real life just doesn't work that way anyway. It's every bit as stressful for guys as it is for girls. Sure, a guy might just wear a cotton plaid shirt that flaps around and hasn't shaved in a week and the girl might fuss over her wardrobe and makeup for hours—but underneath it all, both are probably equally nervous. Because there's a lot at stake.

Regardless of how your "date" is arranged (friends, internet, work, church, ABC Network...), there are a few basic guidelines

that can make the process a little less anxious and more rewarding, and definitely less scary.

Before we even get to the guidelines, here is my absolute most important rule: **Decide in advance what you want to accomplish.**

Clearly Juan Pablo (*The Bachelor*) is looking for a wife and mother for his daughter and the women are hopefully there to find a husband. But if we recall this season's second episode, Victoria seemed to lose sight of that goal and had a bit too much to drink. So many times we react to something, or we're triggered, and before we know it, out comes a comment (or in this case a slurred mess) that instantly freezes the air—or boils it.

To simplify the overall dating process, and reduce some of the most common errors, I've compiled **Four Guidelines for Talking to Your Date.**

1. Maintain positive or neutral nonverbal gestures and expressions: This requires a certain amount of self-control, and sometimes practice. You may recall the first rose that Juan Pablo gave in episode 1 to Sharleen, the opera singer – and her very aloof response that came off as cold and closed. She smoothed it over next episode apologizing and explaining the reaction was one of shock, not dislike – good recovery. Some of us are naturals, and the rest of us have to put some effort in keeping our facial expressions and movements within the definition of neutral. Leaning too forward is not good. Leaning too far back is not good. Stay in the middle.

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2. Don't ask invasive, demanding or judgmental questions: When you meet Martin, don't ask, "So, do you like your job, or are you looking for something more fulfilling?" Ouch. What you intended to ask Martin was if he liked his job, right? What you wanted to accomplish was a dialogue. Not an insult. For all initial conversation, **try to keep things neutral and open-**

ended like, “So what do you enjoy most about your job?” or “What’s the most exciting aspect of working there?”

If your date mentions off-hand that her relationship with her mother has been on the rocks, don’t pry it open just then. Return to it slowly, test the waters to see if it’s something she wants to explore with you.

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3. Don’t be vague about your intentions; explicitly and strategically state your needs: This means that if you’re really looking for someone solid and long-term, sometime after a few dates you need to say that’s your goal. Why waste weeks, months, years with Bradley if all he really cares about are sports and beer? If you’re a single mother looking for not just a husband but a father for your daughter, don’t hide it.

4. Follow your instincts and be ready to leave if things get uncomfortable: While you don’t have to bolt for the door at the first sign of anxiety, if the anxiousness goes on for more than a couple dates, listen to your intuition. If Victoria’s heavy drinking scares you, don’t try to be her therapist. You’re not qualified, and it’s a lousy job. Just move on. If Mike’s constant leering and sexual comments scare you, tell him you’re not a good fit, and don’t meet again.

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Because so much can be riding on that first meeting, having a few basic guidelines in mind can save you a lot of distress. Repeat these guidelines to yourself, and ask a trusted friend to do some rehearsing, or to be available to de-brief if things get tricky. And they can save you from wasting time.

*Author of Emotional Bullshit, Beyond Blame, and his newest release SAY THIS, NOT THAT: A Foolproof Guide to Effective Interpersonal Communication, **Dr. Carl Alasko** writes a weekly blog for the Experts’ online section of Psychology Today,*

which attracts thousands of readers, and his weekly newspaper column "On Relationships" has run in the Monterey County Herald for fifteen consecutive years.