

Alternatives to Couples Therapy: Save Your Relationship and Love Life



By Keith Miller

For many couples, there's no substitute for the dedicated attention of a qualified couples therapist to breathe life into your relationship and love life. For others, an intensive weekend retreat, relationship coach, self-help educational product, or online program can be very effective.

You may want to consider

alternatives to couples therapy, or some combination of both, if your situation warrants it.

If one of the following applies to you, an alternative to couples therapy may be for you:

- You're preparing for marriage or have no serious concerns about your relationship, but want to stay on a good course together.
- Your experiences with couples therapy were so bad that you aren't ready to start the process again.
- You can't afford to pay for couples therapy.
- You want to enhance your couples therapy with complementary educational experiences.

There are vast resources available which are excellent alternatives to couples counseling. Below are a few options:

1. Educational workshops for couples: There are dozens of educational workshops focused on relationships. How do you sort through an overwhelming number of choices to select a reputable workshop and presenter? One time-saving and effective strategy is to search for the three most popular "brands" of couples therapy today and get information about educational workshops based on these approaches in your area.

Related Link: [Relationship Advice: 3 Ways to Handle Unmet Expectations in Marriage](#)

2. Relationship coaching: Coaching in the United States is not regulated by state boards of health as psychotherapy is, and it therefore has a reputation for being a less formal method of getting love advice and help for your relationship. One way relationship coaching is distinct from therapy because a coach is like a personal consultant who assumes you and your partner

are generally healthy and capable of making changes if given guidance and information.

Related Link: [Cameron Diaz: Is Sex the Answer to Relationships and Love?](#)

3. Online self-help for relationships: Proceed wisely. When you turn to the web for advice about your relationship and love life, know that your search results may vary. To assist you in weeding out the far-out from the outstanding, three great websites are www.SmartMarriages.com, www.talkaboutmarriage.com, and www.familydynamics.net.

Keith Miller, LICSW, is the director of a large DC psychotherapy private practice and the author of Love Under Repair: How to Save Your Marriage and Survive Couples Therapy.

Relationship Advice: Social Tips from Ben Franklin and Other Maxims Masters





By Vicky Oliver

Eons ago, long before the invention of Facebook and Match.com, our ancestors grappled with social conundrums. Before Twitter sent out its first tweet, or anyone had heard of an RSS feed, our forebears asked themselves questions. Namely, how does one overcome social alienation, win friends, and build a richly rewarding social life?

Consider these three social, relationship advice gems that have withstood the test of time. Their insights may help form the foundation of a richly rewarding social calendar that leads to new opportunities for success:

1. "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy,

wealthy and wise:" Benjamin Franklin noticed in the late 18th century that good sleeping habits made him feel better and think more clearly. If our overextended, hectic lives leave us too sleep-deprived and grouchy to pursue a rewarding social life, it's time we take Ben's advice. Shut off the computer in favor of shut-eye. Friends and business associates will enjoy their interactions with us more, which may lead to more opportunities.

Related Link: [Q&A Should I Be Concerned About My Man's Social Network Activity with Other Women?](#)

2. "A rolling stone gathers no moss:" What Latin writer Syrus, circa 100 BC, may have foreshadowed regarding our 21st century lifestyle is that many of us move too fast ("rolling") to gather much moss ("a social life"). Think about places where we fritter away our time, such as planes, trains, and automobiles. Then, make a point of engaging fellow travelers in conversation. These individuals may have access to all sorts of insider tips, connections, and other perks that will make the road well traveled more interesting.

Related Link: [Celebrity Couples Who Let Social Media Run Their Relationship](#)

3. "Birds of a feather flock together:" To find our flock, it's often helpful to turn solitary activities into social opportunities. Those who like running or painting might use www.meetup.com to find a running buddy or an artist's colony, writers may consider organizing a monthly writers group, and divorcees can create support groups. Forming groups over shared activities helps us break out of our individual silos and find like-minded individuals.

Vicky Oliver is a leading career development expert and the multi-best-selling author of five books, including her newest, Live Like a Millionaire (Without Having to Be One) (Skyhorse, 2015). She is a sought-after speaker and seminar presenter and

a popular media source, having made over 700 appearances in broadcast, print, and online outlets. For more information, visit vickyoliver.com.

Julie Andrews' Relationship Advice: How to Survive the Death of a Loved One



By Dr. Jane Greer

Actress Julie Andrews revealed that she is still dealing with the death of her husband, Blake Edwards, who passed away in

2010 at the age of 88. They were married for 41 years, and it “was a love story,” according to Andrews. Some days she gets along just fine, but others the loss of this relationship and love hits her like a brick, and she finds herself missing him and wishing he were still with her. This is common when one is dealing with grief, especially the death of a spouse.

When you spend decades with the same person, and form hundreds of habits and routines that include them, it’s devastating when they are no longer with you.

Very often when someone is mourning the loss of a loved one, it is hard for the people around them to understand why they haven’t gotten over it already. As a result, the person who is grieving may have unrealistic expectations of themselves, and could worry that there might be something wrong because they haven’t yet been able to let go. Consequently, they may stop sharing their feelings either because people aren’t asking anymore, or because they think people might no longer want to hear it. With that in mind, the fact that Julie is able to talk publicly about her sadness and not bottle it up is a positive action.

In addition to the normal course of processing the death of someone close to you, there is another piece of relationship advice that helps with coping that I wrote about in my book *The Afterlife Connection: A Therapist Reveals How to Communicate with Departed Loved Ones*. I was compelled to write it after my mother died.

Recognize signs and messages.

In my book, I identified the ways to recognize the signs and messages that are coming your way from your loved one who has died. I also talk about the power of transcommunication, whereby rather than just waiting for those signs, you can initiate contact by directly asking for them.

Utilize the power of experience.

Through the power of the experiences you share, it is possible to remain spiritually connected to the person you lost even after they cross over. It is another way of coping with your grief, and can be a tremendously helpful tool in alleviating the anguish of their death. Although you will always miss your loved one on a physical level, knowing their energy lives on and feeling their presence can help you buffer the pain of their departure. For many people, myself included, you may now feel as if you have a very special guardian angel who is with you when you need them to be.

While we don't know if Julie embraces the possibility of maintaining a spiritual connection to her deceased husband, we do know that at the very least she is being open about the magnitude of her loss. The truth is, we never really get over the death of someone we loved and lost. Rather, we look to get on with it in terms of living our lives as best we can in one way or another. Hopefully Julie can continue to cope with her husband's passing, and be able to enjoy the rest of her life to the fullest without her grief weighing her down.

Please tune in to the Doctor on Call radio hour on HealthyLife.net every Tuesday at 2 PM EST, 11 AM PST. First and third Tuesdays are Shrink Wrap on Call, second Tuesdays are HuffPost on Call, and the last Tuesday of the month is Let's Talk Sex! Email your questions dealing with relationships, intimacy, family, and friendships to Dr. Greer at askdrjane@drjanegreer.com. Connect with Dr. Jane Greer on

www.facebook.com/DrJaneGreer, and be sure to follow @DrJaneGreer on Twitter for her latest insights on love, relationships, sex, and intimacy.

Relationship Advice: 3 Ways to Handle Unmet Expectations in Marriage



By Jennifer Smith

I unintentionally entered marriage with a heart full of expectation of how life would be once I became a wife. I

desired a perfect relationship and love, free of hardship and pain, and full of adventure and passion.

Once we were finally married, I was blindsided by the circumstances we encountered and the conflict that arose in my relationship with my husband. With each passing day, if my husband fell short of fulfilling one of my expectations, discontentment would grow in my heart.

At the climax of our marital issues, when we both thought the next decision in our relationship would be divorce, God saved us! Among many things, God opened my eyes to the destruction of unmet expectations and how I had allowed them to cripple intimacy in our marriage.

I want to provide three ways to handle unmet expectations in marriage based on my experience:

1. Joy: We must cling to joy! Despite our circumstances or conflicts faced in marriage, we must understand that joy is more powerful and more necessary than happiness. If we pursue personal happiness we will never feel fulfilled, but if we pursue joy we find contentment!

Related Link: [Relationship Advice: How to Keep the Spark in Your Relationship After Valentine's Day](#)

2. Contentment: This is the ability to be satisfied no matter what! It's important because there are many things we can

complain about in life. However, if we are able to be content with what we have, including our spouses, than there will be no room in our hearts for bitterness to grow!

Related Link: [Divorce Attorney Jacqueline Newman Offers Relationship Advice: "You Want to Be Divorcing a Happier Spouse"](#)

3. Thankfulness: This is the seed that leads to contentment, which leads to pure joy. We must be intentional everyday to find things in life and in marriage for which we are thankful.

I hope my love advice encourages you today and inspires you to let go of your unmet expectations in marriage. I challenge you to embrace joy, contentment, and thankfulness. When I challenged myself with this task, my heart as a wife was transformed, and my marriage was saved!

Jennifer Smith created Unveiled Wife, a web-based ministry for wives, in March 2011, where she publishes weekly marriage articles and encouragements all geared toward empowering and discipling wives. She shares more of her story in her new book, The Unveiled Wife. Jennifer and her husband currently live in central Oregon with their young son.

Cameron Diaz: Is Sex the Answer to Relationships and Love?





By Dr. Jane Greer

In latest celebrity news, actress Cameron Diaz recently revealed her secrets to a healthy life: diet, exercise, and getting busy between the sheets! She credits sex as being her “fountain of youth,” what keeps her young despite the hectic and fast-paced lifestyle that comes with being a celebrity and constantly in the public eye. Cameron believes people need lots of sex in their relationship and love lives and that it’s a healthy, natural bodily function. She’s right.

My love advice is that sex not only promotes intimacy between partners and strengthens their relationships and love on a physical level, but it also boosts self-confidence and increases happiness.

While having lots of sex promotes health and well-being,

making the time and being able to do it as often as you like can be challenging. A variety of responsibilities can get in the way, including work, children, making dinner, etc. So, what can you do to safeguard against this? Here are a few pieces of dating advice that can help you spend more time in the bedroom and less time worrying about getting there.

Consider scheduling spontaneity.

While it seems paradoxical to plan it, more often than not that spontaneity we all crave happens at the beginning of a relationship when you are falling in love and all you want to do is fall into bed, letting everything else fall by the wayside. But that moment in time can't last forever when there are so many things you need to deal with. That is the tricky part of sex; while it can alleviate stress, making it happen and not letting the stress of everything else on your plate get in the way can be difficult. Still, everyone wants that feeling of being swept away and leaving everything else behind. Considering what stands in the way of that, the reality is that it may not happen unless you plan it. We plan vacations, parties, dinners out – so many activities that we enjoy. Why not plan to be sexually spontaneous with your partner? If you decide that you will spend an hour together on Saturday afternoon, or on Tuesday morning right after you drop the kids off at school, then you can make sure all the things you absolutely have to do are done, and you can allow yourself to not think about them for that hour or so you've set aside. It also gives you an opportunity to look forward to being with your lover in the same way you looked forward to it when you were first establishing your relationship and love. Think of it as mental foreplay. And once you reach your planned date, don't worry about anything else – those dishes can wait!

Related Link: [Cameron Diaz and Benji Madden Visit Her Parents in Florida](#)

Say “Yes” and take a rain check.

But what happens when you really can't find the time? In that case, instead of saying "no," say "yes" and take a rain check. It is so rare that two people want the exact same thing at the exact same time. Maybe you are hoping for a big pizza dinner, but your wife had a huge business lunch and just wants a salad tonight. When that happens, you probably compromise – maybe you'll have a salad tonight and plan for the pizza over the weekend. It's the same thing with sex – presumably you both want it at some point, but maybe not at the exact same time, or maybe one of you wants to do it more often than the other. Many times people just say "no" and leave it at that. But instead of saying you're not in the mood, and leaving your partner to feel undesirable, or to wonder if it is something they've done, say "yes," but not tonight. How about tomorrow? Or, maybe you can compromise, do a little something tonight and more over the weekend when you are both relaxed. Sex doesn't have to be the whole thing all the time.

Related Link: [Benji Madden Sends Celebrity Love Cameron Diaz a Cute 'Miss You' Message](#)

Embrace the moment.

Finally, do your best to embrace the moment! How often has your partner come up behind you and given you a hug that makes you think: sex now, really? You know you haven't showered yet, or closed all the windows for the night, or responded to all those emails just waiting there for you. So you push off the advances, thinking you can get back to that later, after everything else is done. The problem is, not only is that moment of excitement long gone by the time you return to it, but your partner might feel unwanted and rejected in the meantime. Whatever you are doing to take care of things so you can relax better can be a put off to the other person. If you are at a party and your favorite song comes on, you wouldn't finish eating, carefully fold your napkin, take another drink, and risk getting out onto the dance floor with only the last notes of that song left. No, you'd jump up, grab your

partner's hand, enjoy dancing to the song, and get back to everything else after. Sometimes life gets in the way of the moment, and in letting that happen you let the passion evaporate. The next time your partner gives you that romantic snuggle, go with the flow. Try to see if your sex doesn't sizzle a little more because you stepped into the passion while it was burning hot.

No matter what might work for you, it's helpful to keep in mind that the quality of the sex you have with your partner is as, if not more, important than the quantity, especially since everyone has different notions as to what seems like a lot or enough sex. As long as you and your partner can find a middle ground on how often you both want sex, you'll both be content.

We can thank Cameron Diaz for being so open and sharing her secret to healthy living with all of us!

Who Gets the Dog Post-Relationship and Love?





By Jacqueline Newman

A couple of years ago, a lovely woman named Sara came into my law office for an initial consultation. One of the first things she said to me was, “All I care about is Molly. I do not care about the money – I need her to be with me.” Now, this is not uncommon as many of my clients who have fallen out of a relationship and love feel that protecting their children is their number one concern. I asked the client, “Who would you say is the primary caretaker for Molly?” Her response (again, very typically was) “I am the one who takes care of her daily needs. I feed her, I wash her, I take her to the doctor, I take her to the park, I set up her play dates – I do absolutely everything for her.” When I asked her about her spouse, Linda’s, relationship with Molly, she responded, “She does love Molly and will play with her occasionally, but she does not care for her the way that I do.” Sara then whipped out her heart shaped keychain that had a picture of Molly ... her little pug puppy.

In the days when a dog was just a dog and slept on the rug by the bed instead of in the bed, I would have explained to Sara

that courts treat animals like any other personal property.

Now in the pet-centric society that we live in, courts are trending toward looking at animals differently and applying similar standards to those used when determining custody of children when people fall out of their relationships and love.

A court will often consider who the primary caretaker of the pet is and will look to the “best interests” standard when determining custody.

The advice I gave to Sara is similar to the advice that I would give any parent. I said, “If you want to be awarded custody of Molly, you need to be able to show a court that you are and have been during the marriage, the primary caretaker for the puppy.” The history of caretaking plays a large role in custody determinations and it is logical to think the same mindset will apply in a pet custody fight. I told Sara to keep a journal of the times that she takes Molly to the vet and a detailed list of what she does to care for Molly. If the judge needs to select one party to have Molly reside with, Sara needs to be able to show that her pup will thrive best in her care.

Typically if there are young human children within the marriage, I find that most parents agree that the dog will follow the children. When the children are packing up to spend the weekend with one parent, the dog packs up his dog bones, too. This way the children are not deprived of time with their

pet and it aids in their transition between homes. Even when children are not in the picture, people can also share custody of their pets and set up a specific access schedule. Expenses for the pet can also be shared (which can be quite significant when you factor in doggy day care and veterinarian expenses – Molly needs to have her organic high fiber dog food!).

Up next... prenupts for pups!

Jacqueline Newman is a Family Law Attorney & Managing Partner at Berkman Bottger Newman & Rodd in NYC. Ms. Newman's practice consists of litigation, collaborative law and mediation. Jacqueline specializes in complex high net worth matrimonial cases and negotiating prenuptial agreements. She has appeared as a commentator on various television shows and has been quoted as an expert in numerous publications, including Glamour Magazine, Crain's New York Business, U.S. News and World Report, Woman's Day and The Huffington Post.

Lady Gaga: Does Her Celebrity Engagement Ring Raise the Bar?





By Dr. Jane Greer

Singer and superstar Lady Gaga got engaged to her longtime boyfriend Taylor Kinney on Valentine's Day weekend. The [celebrity engagement](#) involved Kinney giving Gaga a one-of-a-kind huge heart-shaped engagement ring that includes a T and S for their initials. We could all see it sparkling on her finger when she sang at The Academy Awards recently. It harkens back to young love when everyone would write their initials in a heart, and it's both romantic and lavish.

What Lady Gaga's Celebrity Engagement Ring Means for Other Couples

So, what does the magnitude of her celebrity engagement ring mean for everyone else – her followers and fans? Does it raise the bar, and possibly make non-celebrity couples who are now getting engaged feel that they have to do something extraordinary and unique in order to make their partner feel special?

Related Link: [Latest Celebrity News: Lady Gaga Takes the Polar Plunge with Fiancé Taylor Kinney](#)

Getting engaged is a big deal – and not just because of the ring. There are so many pieces of love advice to consider as you figure out the best way to make it exceptional for both of you. Of course, there is no denying that the ring has become symbolic of the whole event. When it comes to Lady Gaga's celebrity engagement, that has certainly been something the press has been focusing on. She and her ring are both distinctive and seem to suit each other perfectly. While that is wonderful for her, it is important to keep in mind that we are all original and rare, so what might be perfect for her won't necessarily be right for your non-celebrity couple status. Your ring can be remarkable without having to be a showstopper.

The idea that an engagement ring has to be original, handmade and/or very expensive can skew what everyone hopes for, and if those expectations are too high, you might end up missing the point of what you are actually doing – which is pledging your love to each other and agreeing to spend your lives together. I have seen many women who were let down by the engagement ring they received because it wasn't the size, style or stone they had wished for. The engagement ring speaks to commitment and endurance, and the willingness to go the distance with your partner.

With that in mind, try to keep what you envisioned realistic to the man you are with, the resources he has, as well as his interest and taste in jewelry. Just because he doesn't design it or get you as big a ring as your girlfriend may have received, that doesn't mean you are loved less. Whatever ring you receive will be testimony of his relationship and love and the desire to share his future with you. So when he pops the question and holds out the much-anticipated ring he chose for you, it can usher in excitement rather than disappointment. Keep it about for better or worse, rather than for bigger or

worse.

Related Link: [Lady Gaga Celebrates Celebrity Engagement with Taylor Kinney's 'Chicago Fire' Family](#)

The bottom line is that an engagement ring does not have to be the only one of its kind, over-the-rainbow-fabulous to symbolize the love you share for each other and the commitment you are making to each other. For Lady Gaga it is a huge diamond heart, for you it might be something else, possibly not even a diamond but an emerald or a ruby. In the end, though, you both hope the ring will lead you to the same place – bringing in a life full of love and adventure together.

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Dating Advice on How to Meet Someone for Valentine's Day





By April Davis

With Valentine's around the corner, you may feel a lot of pressure to find the person who's right for you. Relationships and love are something that few people put much effort and energy into finding.

Many think that if you just sit back, then it will just happen when it happens. The problem is that it won't happen while you're sitting on the couch. Here's some dating advice you can use to meet your Valentine.

1. First thing's first – Get rid of the idea that Valentine's day is the deadline.

It can be a checkpoint, but not a deadline. It's a process to find the person you can spend the rest of your life with and there are steps involved. It's not like buying a car where you can go to the dealer and give your preferences on features, color, etc. Remember it will take some time and effort to meet the one for you and there are a billion possible matches for you, but it can be a lot of fun in the meantime if you're open-minded.

2. Wear red.

When you're out and about at social gatherings or just any given day at work or the grocery store, take advantage of the Winter seasonal colors and wear red. This will attract attention to yourself and it's sexy. Also, research has shown that people are more attracted to both women AND men who wear red.

3. Get out and be seen.

Your future King or Queen isn't going to find you in front of your TV at home. Get online and find all the singles events, happy hours, business networking events, nonprofit fundraisers, etc. and get them on your calendar. This dating advice can save you a lot of worry, so be proactive. These places are full of professionals and many of them are going to be single. The places you go to meet people don't all have to be singles events. When you are at these events don't forget to smile and try out your refined conversation skills. One trick to open the door for conversation at an event, go up to someone you'd like to meet, have a drink in your hand, and say, "Cheers". Most anyone will respond positively.

4. Learn how to make a connection with someone while in conversation.

This really is a skill set and not everyone knows how to do it. One thing you can do to start improving in this area is to initiate conversations with anyone you meet. Don't wait to

only talk with people you're attracted to or want to date. It's smarter to be friendly and practice connecting with anyone you meet.

If you're in the elevator, smile, say hello, and make a comment to the other person sharing it with you. Maybe you can notice something about their bag, hair, or what they're wearing. Throw out a compliment to the person working behind the counter. Ask your server at a restaurant a question such as, "Where are you from?" These are all ways to start a conversation and will help you to build your confidence when it's time for you to chat it up with someone you are interested in.

5. Make a list of things you've always wanted to do, and do it.

If your New Year's resolution is to get in shape, then get in the gym. Or maybe you've always wanted to try rock climbing. There are several groups out there that will provide lessons and get you started. How great would it be to meet someone there who you already know you have something in common with? Love advice: Don't forget to wear red ☐

While Valentine's Day can feel annoying when you're single, it's a reminder to us that relationships play an important role in our lives. By following these couple of tips, you're being proactive in your future and finding the person who is right for you. Then next year you may even be spending Valentine's with your new partner.

April Davis, founder of Cupid's Cronies is sharing some of her tips for meeting someone this Valentine's Day. With offices throughout the U.S., Cupid's Cronies is bringing a lot of love to people through her various services from having a wing woman or wingman alongside them, an online dating assistance or simply just good ol' fashioned dating coach.

Relationships and Love Are Overrated



By Brian Worley

While “Virginia is for Lovers,” Valentine’s Day is all about celebrating your lover. However, relationships and love are overrated. Don’t stress out if you are among the more than half of the single population in the U.S. that will be celebrating this romantic holiday solo, because you are not alone. According to a report on Bloomberg.com, you are one of the 124.6 million single Americans that will not be contributing to the \$13.19 billion annual spend on roses, candy, candlelit dinners and stuffed cupids. Take this dating

advice, and put love on hold, if not only for the amount of money you can save!

The average consumer spends \$116.21 on Valentine's Day, so pocket the cash and follow these sexy, single and ready to mingle tips that could potentially leave you with Cupid's arrow piercing your heart or a bunch of mental memories of another night on the town where you have the time of your life and can still keep searching for that relationship and love.

Here are the 5 Ways to throw a Singles Party that Rocks:

1. Invitees: It is all about the singles. Invite single friends only and each person needs to bring a new single friend. Make sure there are an equal number of guys and gals to mix up the fun. So where do you find these singletons? Your social network – Invite people in your social circle on Facebook or maybe you have common friends but you don't know them. Now, is your chance to branch out and invite them.

2. Décor: Forget about pink and red. A little played out isn't it? Well this year try turquoise and orange. Let's think a little bit more about that décor. A star is defined as a bright point of light in the sky or a five-sided drawing that is meant to resemble the points of light in the sky. So you can have star shaped sugar cookies – green with vanilla icing

packaged up as a parting gift. Or, do the whole party around the opposites of what people think. For example, – Not roses...Rather thistle- Not chocolate...Bring out the steak.

3. Playlist of music: Just forget all those love songs and bring out the real fun jams! Such as “All the Single Ladies.”

4. Food / Beverages: Keep it fun and flowing. The opposite of chocolate is vanilla so why not add some vanilla touches. And, make sure the food is fun – Gourmet Grilled Cheese sandwiches are easy to make and always a big hit.

5. Invitation: And, don't forget about the invite. How about setting the theme in advance by sending the party goer a puzzle piece and they then have to find the person that has the other piece of the puzzle.

They say, ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’ which seems to be more accurate on Valentine’s Day than any other holiday. As you throw yourself into the perfect singles soiree, think about all your couple friends in a relationship and love eating overpriced dinners because technically love is in the air. Follow these fun pointers and next Valentine’s Day, you may just find yourself on the other side of the fence receiving a dozen of the 196 million red roses produced to show how much you are loved!

[Brian Worley](#) is the co-founder of Your-Bash and TV’s favorite event planner and LA’s man about town. Worley is known for his over the top and memorable style and has been the voice of everything from E!’s Party Monsters Cabo, to WE TV’s Platinum Weddings, to The Style Channel’s Big Party Plan Off. From American Idol Parties, to the Oscar Pre-Show and Grammy After Party, Worley says the key is to NOT go with tradition.

Relationship Expert Shares Hot Valentine's Day Gifts



By Kris Schoels

6 million – The number of people who expect or are planning a marriage proposal.

1.9 billion – The amount people will spend on flowers alone.

53% – Women who would end their relationship and love if they didn't get something for Valentines Day

With these statistics, it's no wonder we get crazy about a seemingly harmless day in February. As a relationship expert, I think Valentine's Day should be about managing expectations and making sure you both are on the same page about gifts and celebrating.

Here are some ideas for Valentine's Day presents...and a few things you should never get for the girl in your life!

1. Gym membership or workout gear: Is that ever a good idea?

I say yes, but only if your partner is already into working out in the first place. Have a Pilates lover? Get her a class pack to her favorite studio. Significant other running in a marathon late this year? Buy her some running clothes. Dating someone who is not into the gym or fitness at all? This is not the time to introduce them to the fitness scene. I can guarantee it will cause some hurt feelings and self-doubt.

Related Link: [Dating Advice for How to Manage Valentine's Day Expectations](#)

2. What about jewelry (or any item that isn't a ring) in a small box?

I am just going to put this out there: If they do not already have a ring on their finger, girls want to be engaged! You don't have to be a relationship expert to figure this one out. If you have been together a while, they will probably (even if you have told them you are not going to) think that you are going to propose on Valentine's Day. Do NOT, under any circumstances, give them a gift in a small box *unless* it is an engagement ring.

3. Go the traditional route and give flowers.

Maybe some people will disagree with me, but I feel like you can't ever lose with flowers. All girls love flowers, and it doesn't matter to me if they are straight from the grocery store or arranged by the best florist in town. Flowers bring a

smile to anyone's face.

4. What about lingerie?

I'm on the fence about lingerie, as I think it's more of a gift women get for the men in their life. I say, if you are a guy, stick to a nice silk robe instead of a lacy and racy underwear set. Robes are safe – they're pretty, useful, and appreciated.

Related Link: [Love Advice: 3 Signs He's the Right Guy to Be Your Valentine](#)

5. Avoid a gift certificate.

These are not personal enough and seem like a cop out. Save them for other occasions, even birthdays – but not the most romantic day of the year.

6. Don't have money to spend?

Cook a nice meal for her (or together) and give her a sweet love note. You don't have to spend money to make a girl happy; just some time together and attention is enough for your relationship and love.

Founder, blogger, wife, Kris Schoels began The Chic Wife based on the idea of creating an ongoing dialogue inspired by the unique juxtaposition of her peanut farm-life upbringing to her now married, everyday city lifestyle. Beyond her blog, Schoels has been seen on The Today Show, Insider Edition, Access Hollywood, Dr. Oz, Hallmark Channel, Fox&Friends, The Better Show, just to name a few while also having been featured in Shape, Self, Martha Stewart and OK! Magazine with her chic tips and budget tricks.

Relationship Advice: The 8 Best Budget-Friendly Valentine's Gifts



By Jude Bijou MA MFT

Lots of us, particularly males, fret about what to do for Valentine's Day. Need some relationship advice? Chocolate and roses are nice, but not exactly creative or even heartfelt.

Sexy lingerie or a romantic dinner may be fun, but is this what she

really wants?

I talk to many clients who express genuine anxiety about Valentine's Day, and this is what I tell them: Don't get caught up in peer pressure or commercialism associated with Valentine's Day. Instead, think of it as a time to honor your love partner, and to let this person know you value, respect, and admire him or her. With that as your intention, giving the "gift" is actually very easy. Best of all, it won't cost you a cent.

Take some relationship advice and use these 8 gifts that will win the heart of your Valentine.

- 1. Put it in writing:** Write a list of qualities that you appreciate about your loved one, and put those words in a card, poem, or a short video of you reading the list.
- 2. Stir up memories:** Jot down 5 or so of your favorite, most precious memories of your partner and the time you've spent together, and convey them verbally.

Related Link: ['Single Ladies' Star Denise Vasi Shares Her Valentine's Day Plans](#)

- 3. Grant a wish:** Put yourself in your lover's shoes and think of a chore or an activity that would bring a smile or ease some stress. Then make it happen.
- 4. Spend some time:** Arrange an outing to a favorite place you share, maybe a hike or a stroll around a special neighborhood. Or just take the evening off from your normal routine and cook a favorite dinner.
- 5. Be emotionally generous:** Refrain from making negative jokes

about Valentine's Day or your loved one's views about the day. Regardless of how you feel, only say positive things.

Related Link: [Valentine's Day Advice: Nine Gift Ideas for the Frugalista](#)

6. Lend an ear: Set up a cozy place to talk and ask your loved one questions about life, dreams, wishes, and feelings. Offer to "just listen" while he or she talks and shares. Don't interrupt.

7. Clean the slate: Valentine's Day is as good a day as any to let go of any grudges you're holding and to accept your loved one, flaws and all. This will help you genuinely say, "I love you just as you are."

8. Fall in love anew: Allow yourself to fall in love again. Conjure memories and feelings of a time you were full of feelings of love for your Valentine, and keep your focus there. Recall the way you felt when you first met.

*Jude Bijou, MA, MFT, is a respected psychotherapist, professional educator, and workshop leader. Her theory of Attitude Reconstruction® evolved over the course of more than 30 years working with clients as a licensed marriage and family therapist, and is the subject of her award-winning book, **Attitude Reconstruction: A Blueprint for Building a Better Life**. Learn more at www.attitudereconstruction.com.*

Expert Dating Advice for How

to Manage Valentine's Day Expectations



By Joan Barnard

When it seems like every woman you know is getting the royal treatment on Valentine's Day, it's easy to feel disappointed when the man in your life does not meet your expectations—and you wouldn't be the only one.

According to a new study published by the National Retail Federation, Americans are expected to spend

over \$18.9 billion on Valentine's Day gifts this year.

With jewelry commercials on loop and Valentine's Day card nostalgia in full swing, it's no surprise that people feel the pressure to spend—and that the spending adds up to almost \$150 for the average person.

Related Link: [Relationship Expert Shares Hot Valentine's Day Gifts](#)

Spare yourself (and your guy) Valentine's Day stress by following these three pieces of expert dating advice. They're sure to keep your expectations in check:

1. Let him know how much (or little) you care about Valentine's Day: Men understand that women have expectations for Valentine's Day, but many have a hard time distinguishing just how high (or low) those expectations are. If it's your first Valentine's Day together, give him a heads up that you're looking for an evening fit for a Hollywood couple, or if you'd rather just stay home, let him know—the earlier the better.

2. Make suggestions: Saying, "I want to do something fun on Valentine's Day" won't cut it; it's too subjective. Making concrete suggestions about what you want will set the tone. You might say, "Wouldn't a couples massages be fun?" or "This would be the perfect time to try that cute French restaurant." Sharing suggestions will give him some parameters: how much to spend, how romantic the gift should be, etc.

3. Make sure your suggestions match the level of your relationship: If you have suggestions in mind, make sure they match where you are in your relationship and love. If you're expecting a card and receive a diamond necklace, you'll feel overwhelmed—the same way your partner would feel if he's

expecting to give you a card and you ask for a diamond necklace. Be realistic. Save expensive gifts for your serious established relationships.

Related Link: [Love Advice: 3 Signs He's the Right Guy to Be Your Valentine](#)

When it comes to your relationship and love, don't let one day decide how things will or won't progress—think about the big picture. Does your partner value you? Do they value your happiness? Do you feel consistently happy with him? My expert dating advice would say that if the answer is “yes,” a bouquet of flowers—or nothing at all—won't change that.

Joan Barnard is the resident dating and relationship expert and blog editor for Zoosk, the online dating site home to 29+ million users worldwide and the #1 mobile dating app. She authors the weekly Joan Actually advice column, responding to dating and relationship questions from 14+ million readers who are in, out of, and between relationships. She hosts a weekly dating advice series for nearly 9,000+ Zoosk YouTube subscribers and also records 15-second dating advice spots on Instagram.

Dating Advice: How to Date & Get the Best Results





By Deborah Downey

The most important aspect of dating is to be confident. Men and women want different things from relationships and love as they age. Consider the following dating advice, as it's perfect for those of you who want more options when it comes to the dating pool and are determined to find true love in a monogamous, committed relationship filled with passion and purpose with the person of your dreams.

7-Step Dating System for Relationships and Love

To begin, design your search path and ask yourself what you want your love life to look like. Dating is a fact-finding mission; it's a process of elimination. You will attract someone with the exact amount of self-worth that you possess. Follow these steps:

Step one: Define what you want. Not who you want.

Related Link: [10 Relationship Myths](#)

Step two: Evaluate your readiness and check your motives.

Step three: Revise your needs and make sure they are realistic and that you have attainable goals.

Step four: Build your mindset and lose any doubt.

Step five: Create a “want ad for love” to the universe (not to print or show or tell anyone). Also, construct a strategy / plan to meet your loved one.

Step six: Prepare, Practice, and Poise

Step seven: Support Sorting and Sex

Related Link: [Dating Advice: Six Tips for Meeting Someone Special in 2015](#)

Check out the following conversation topics to use as dating advice:

Talk about books, movies, interests, hobbies, parents, work, hopes and dreams, spirituality, habits, relationship to money, health, their financial health... any debt? Last relationship? Why it ended ...how long it lasted...what they found really unappealing? What they learned about themselves?

Final Thoughts:

Make sure to watch and listen carefully on a date. People will show you who they are by how they treat wait staff or drivers. Take your own car for the first few dates, and go to places where there are lots of people. Stay away from his or her place for a minimum of 3 dates.

A date for the first 3 weeks is best if it lasts no longer than 3 hours.

Don't take or be taken hostage by spending multiple days on a date with someone. Only see them once or twice a week for the first 3 weeks and try to see other people while dating them until you mutually agree to be exclusive. Do ask them about sexually transmitted diseases, and make sure they've been tested recently.

Deborah Downey's experience spans 25 years of recovery in various 12-step programs around the country. Holding certifications as a professional life coach and as a chemical dependency counselor, Downey has dealt with addiction in its various forms, both as the child of alcoholic parents and as a confidant for others. In her self-help book, "What Are You Worried About!" (<http://www.coachdeborahdowney.com/>), Downey, who has multiple sclerosis, details a proactive approach to training one's mind to think positive.

Dating Advice: Six Tips for Meeting Someone Special in 2015





By Dana Michel

The holidays are over, and 2015 is here! Like many of us, you've probably made a New Year's resolution to step up your game in the area of relationships and love. If that resolution includes finding a partner, you might not succeed if you're searching the old fashioned way.

Below are six pieces of dating advice to help you in your journey to find that special someone and improve your relationships and love life in 2015.

1. Eliminate those that are not marriage material: Don't waste time with someone you would never introduce to your family or colleagues, much less marry. He/she is only standing in the way of your true happiness.

Related Link: [Justin Bieber Confirms He's 'Super Single'](#)

2. Become the person that attracts your type: This important piece of dating advice shouldn't be ignored! If you're looking for a physically fit partner, but you have succumbed to watching Netflix from the couch while eating fast food, you may want to start hitting the gym this year. You may find Mr. Right while lifting weights and running on the treadmill.

Related Link: [Four Changes You MUST Make to Avoid Prey to the Unavailable Man](#)

3. Do not put your life on hold or defer happiness until you meet "The One": Take that trip overseas, become a homeowner, get a new hobby or entertain more. These dating and relationship advice tips can help make you a much more interesting and confident person. Raising your appeal increases your chances.

4. Sign up for online dating: Choose the service that works best for you and remember to be true to yourself. If you're looking for a serious relationship, don't sign up for a casual hookup site. Online dating gives you the chance to expand your options.

5. Ask friends to introduce you to eligible people: Consider getting help and introductions to men from those pesky relatives who don't understand why you're still single.

6. Become more active outside of your home and work: Start a new hobby, volunteer, and deliberately attend social events where you can mingle and strike up conversations with new people.

Thankfully, love can happen very quickly when you meet the right person. Look at celebrity couple George Clooney and Amal Alamuddin, for instance. The duo became engaged in less than a year. Most men say they knew their fiancé was special very early on in their relationship.

A new dating site, Marriage Material, is not your typical

dating venue. Founder and President, Dana Michelhas, created a place where only marriage-minded singles can go to find their true love. Marriage Material has over 20,000 members, and their services are available in selected areas. For more information, visit www.marriagematerial.co. To arrange an interview with Dana Michel, please contact danna@blinkpr.com.

3 Ways to Support Your Anxious Partner



By Sherianna Boyle

Having a partner who tends to worry about the past and future

can be both physically and mentally exhausting. Some of the symptoms of anxiety include fear, self doubt, dread, and negative thinking. Over time, this can take its toll on both partners. Relationships that start close and caring may become tense and hurtful.

When this occurs, the relationship itself is a trigger for old fears and wounds. Science shows what you think and believe about stress and anxiety matters. If you want to support your partner, yet you secretly believe their stress is the source of your problems, this is likely to exacerbate rather than diminish the symptoms. Supporting your partner is not as much about what you *will* do but how you **are** being. Below are three basic guidelines to support you through this process:

Related Link: [Reducing Dating Anxiety in 5 Ways or Less](#)

1. Watch your language: Notice if you hear yourself say (either silently or out loud) statements such as, *He is so anxious or She is so reactive*. When thoughts are repeated they can turn into beliefs. Unconsciously, your partner is likely to pick up more on what you believe rather than what you think. If what you believe is judgmental in nature know that nothing changes from a state of judgment. It is a growth barrier. People grow and learn from being heard, appreciated, and loved. When negative thoughts come your way, visualize wiping the words from your mind. The key is to do this from a place of playfulness, meaning keep it light and non-aggressive.

2. Practice neutral observations: Now that you have erased the words from your mind, take a deep inhale and exhale. On inhale, puff out your lower abdomen. On exhale, pull in your navel. Watch how the breath lands on your skin. Notice any sensations and tingly feeling as you continue to breathe three to four more times (slowly). As you practice observing yourself through a more neutral state, you can then practice

this with your partner. Next time your partner complains or worries about something, return to neutral observations. This allows you to break free from feeding anxious behaviors. Often, couples unconsciously get into the habit of being stressed around each other. Neutral observations allow you to break this neurological pattern.

Related Link: [4 Tips to Reduce New Year's Eve Dating Anxiety](#)

3. Exercise gratitude: Anxiety and gratitude cannot live together. You cannot be grateful and fearful at the same time. One of the best ways to support your partner is to express your appreciation and gratitude. It could be as simple as saying thankful or acknowledging something you appreciate.

Sherianna Boyle is the author of [The Four Gifts of Anxiety](#). She is also the co-host of the television show, 'Thriving from Anxiety.' Her background includes working as a school psychologist, adjunct psychology professor, parent educator, seasoned yoga/mediation teacher, professional speaker, and mother of three children. Additional resources, such as her video download on Yoga for Anxiety, visit www.sheriannaboyle.com.

10 Relationship Myths





By Dr. John Demartini

We have all read about happily ever after and other misleading fantasies in story books. Even in adulthood, most people buy into these childhood ideas. However, believing in these common myths will keep you from fully experiencing the riches that every relationship has to offer.

Here are the top ten relationship myths:

MYTH 1: A New Relationship Will Make Me Happy

During the initial infatuation phase of a relationship, you see mostly the positive side of the person. There is a strong attraction, positive traits, and potential for lasting happiness. However, that is just a delusion. Regardless of how well a relationship begins, you will eventually experience both sides of the person. A relationship will not change this natural experience of human emotions.

MYTH 2: When I Find My Soul Mate, I Will Feel Complete

Living as if your soul mate will complete you will only lead to heartbreak. The illusions that you project onto your soul

mate will inevitably fall apart when they sometimes behave in a manner that is not supporting you. A soul mate can be one person or several people in your life that fully complement you and help you find your own wholeness.

MYTH 3: The Right Relationship Will Last Forever

For every relationship beginning, there is another one ending. So, the idea of forever is an unrealistic expectation. A relationship lasts as long as both people communicate in each other's highest values or priorities.

MYTH 4: Once We Get Past These Rough Waters, It Will Be Smooth Sailing

Relationships are not static and no one remedy will eliminate all your supposed troubles. As I mentioned above, life involves a balance of difficulty and ease; of liberty and constraint.

MYTH 5: A Good Relationship Requires Sacrifice

Sacrifice tends to breed resentment. Anytime you do something you do not want to do, or see no benefit to yourself in doing it, then you will become resentful. This may happen immediately, or unconsciously. It is wiser to master the art of communicating in each other's values.

MYTH 6: Great Sex Happens Only at the Beginning of a Relationship

Both lust and intimate lovemaking can continue to grow and evolve throughout a relationship, as long as you understand and disable any unrealistic expectations that might shut it down. This includes the myths listed here.

MYTH 7: In the Right Relationship, I Will Not Have to Work at It

Many people hang on to the idea that being with someone should happen naturally. However, a fulfilling relationship requires concentration, organization, effort and skill.

MYTH 8: If I am Not Involved with Someone, I Will Be Lonely

People can feel lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness is a function of how you perceive yourself relative to your environment. You can sleep right next to someone and yet feel a thousand miles distant or be a thousand miles distant but feel as if they are close.

MYTH 9: Children Complete a Marriage

Children are unlikely to complete a union just as romantic partners are unlikely to complete each other.

MYTH 10: Opposites Attract

There is no true opposite only an apparent opposite. Every human has the same potential for love, anger, greatness, hope, despair etc. What you see in a romantic partner is also present in you. It is just expressed in a different way.

[Dr. John Demartini](#) is a world-renowned human behavioral specialist, author, and educator.

Four Changes You MUST Make to Avoid Falling Prey to the Unavailable Man





By April Kirkwood

Something mystical occurs when a beloved arrives and touches our heart. We become mesmerized as if we're under a spell, and we are deaf to all rational thought. We are cut off from cognitive reasoning and common sense as he slips his hand in ours. We blindly ignore the wedding ring on his hand, the calls from his kids during love making, and holidays alone as he spends time with family and friends.

Eventually, the dream of landing the unavailable man starts to crumble. Weeks fade into years, turning us into hateful, bipolar lunatics lost in lies and deception. The eventual breakup ends badly. He calls us crazy, a mistake, or denies "us" altogether.

For months after, we stumble through our days half drunk with deep pain. Confused and broken, our eyes are forced open by the glaring sun of truth. Our mind spins out of control with a million feelings. We go over details and ask questions that will never be answered. We toss and turn night after night, get lost in glasses of wine, and we pour out our hearts to

anyone who will listen. In short, we are a total train wreck.

Sound familiar?

The truth is that the 'unavailable man' is a part of our culture. Cheating is as permanent as the stars in the sky. The cheating man is not going away. On the contrary, because of social media and technology, these scoundrels can get away with more than they ever have before.

However, the Unavailable Man does not have to be a character in your life's story. After years of counseling, I have found that many women (from various demographics) carry with them certain thoughts and beliefs that lead them straight to the Heartbreak Hotel. Beliefs that don't serve and support what we all truly want and deserve; a monogamous relationship with a honest man who is capable, willing, and ready to love us.

Smart UP Ladies

1. Quit being DEAF to what men say: "I'm a mess." "I just want to have fun." They often tell the truth to make themselves feel less guilty. However, you are too busy selling yourself to hear it clearly. Be a fly on the wall and watch the lies fall.

Related: [How to Defend Against Four Emotional Vampires](#)

2. Stop acting DUMB: Never give anyone the benefit of the doubt. Check him out. It's not being mean; it's just being smart. If your research checks out, he never needs to know.

Related: [Miley Cyrus Celebrates Birthday with Patrick Schwarzenegger](#)

3. Get rid of being BLIND to the obvious: He keeps his life a bit of a mystery because he is hiding the truth.

4. Don't act like a CHILD: Get rid of fantasy ideals like: Dreams do come true, wishes come true, and love conquers all.

Seriously! Grow up and get real. You are not Cinderella!

Most importantly, always be kind and classy. Years later, it will be you not him who has something we like to call, integrity. That's the best revenge of all.

April Kirkwood is a graduate of Youngstown State University with two masters in education—in school and community counseling. April worked for more than 25 years in public education and in the mental health field as a social worker, teacher, guidance counselor, and mentor for new teachers. April is also the author of “Big Boys Do Cry: Why May Affair with Frankie Valli Matters” which is set to release in 2015. Learn more about April Kirkwood by visiting aprilkirkwood.com or by Subscribing to her new Youtube Series AprilofCourse.

How to Defend Against Four Emotional Vampires





By Judith Orloff, MD

Adapted from the new book, "The Ecstasy of Surrender"

Many of us are drawn to emotional vampires. From bullies, to clingy lovers, to complainers, emotional vampires wear many different disguises. Intentionally or not, these romantic partners can make us feel depressed, overwhelmed, defensive, wiped out, and angry.

It's important to figure out why you choose to date people who deplete your energy. Then, you need to learn self-defense strategies to keep them at bay. If you don't, you could become a victim of the emotional vampire and develop unhealthy behaviors and symptoms, such as overeating, isolating, mood swings, or fatigue.

Below are four common types of emotional vampires you may unwittingly get involved with, adapted from the book *The Ecstasy of Surrender*, along with some "silver bullet" tips for fending them off.

Type #1: The Passive-Aggressive Person. This type of vampire expresses anger with a smile or exaggerated concern but always

maintains their cool. They are experts at sugar-coating hostility.

Self-defense Tips: Let go of self-doubt and trust your gut reactions. Tell yourself that you deserve to be treated more lovingly. Address their behavior. In a calm, firm tone you might say, "I would greatly appreciate it if you can be on time when we go out to dinner." If nothing changes, keep setting limits with this person and scale back on the time you spend with them.

Type #2: The Narcissist. For this vampire, everything is about them. They are ego-centric, self-important, and starved for admiration and attention. They may be charming and intelligent until their guru status is threatened.

Self-defense Tips: Enjoy their good qualities, but have realistic expectations. Their motto is "me-first," so getting angry or stating your needs won't have any effect on them. Beware of this type, because narcissists lack empathy and are incapable of unconditional love. You may be able to get their cooperation by appealing to their self-interest and showing them how your request will benefit them.

Type #3: The Anger Addict. This vampire deals with conflict by accusing, attacking, humiliating, or criticizing. Some anger addicts withhold things, or resort to using the silent treatment to punish you.

Self-defense Tips: Don't let their anger wear down your self-esteem. Pause when agitated. Take a few slow breaths to relax, and do not respond until you are in a centered place. Try to stay neutral and balanced, and disarm the person by agreeing with them or acknowledging their position. Then state your case. It's also useful to empathize with anger addicts. Ask yourself what pain or inadequacy makes them so angry.

Type #4: The Guilt Tripper. These types are world-class blamers, martyrs, and drama queens. They know how to make you

feel bad about something by pressing your insecurity buttons.

Self-defense Tips: Let go of the notion that you have to be perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. If you feel really guilty, find a private place and let yourself cry. You can also reply with a positive statement such as, “I can see your point of view. But when you say ___, my feelings are hurt. I’d be grateful if you didn’t keep repeating it.”

* * * * *

Judith Orloff MD is a UCLA psychiatrist and author of “The Ecstasy of Surrender: 12 Surprising Ways Letting Go Can Empower Your Life”. A New York Times bestselling author, Dr. Orloff teaches workshops nationwide, has given a TED talk on this book, and has appeared on The Dr. Oz Show, Today, PBS, CNN, NPR, and many others. Learn more at www.drjudithorloff.com.

Is Your Wardrobe Preventing You From Meeting a Partner?





By Ashley Martini

It probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind when we're seeking love. Usually, we're wondering where we should be hanging out and where all the single people are. We shouldn't care what other people think; right?

Wrong...because it may be preventing us from meeting our potential significant other. Clothing is a way to show off our personalities; however, we don't want to come off misconstrued.

Nowadays, perception is reality, and quite often, books are judged by their covers. Clothing plays a huge role in our lives and is the armor we put on every morning before we head out into the world. We don't want our clothing to potentially mislead someone from coming our way. We can all be intimidating or maybe not so fashion savvy. Keeping what we wear in mind and being open-minded may help us meet the right someone. Of course, always keep setting and dress code in mind.

Ladies and gents, not to worry! I've provided a few basic tips will keep you in the safe zone. Once you meet him/her...you're on your own! Till then, let these tips guide you to your next relationship!

1. Grooming. Grooming is essential: Clean hair, a good scent, freshly washed clothing, and a manicure will keep you looking fresh! This is such an easy way to complete your look and one of the most important!

Related: [Giveaway: Reese Witherspoon's Sexy Sophisticated Style](#)

2. Over dress rather than under dress: This will seek positive attention and a bit of a mystery in a more casual environment. Looking sharp all the time is the way to go.

Related: [Zoe Saldana's Laid-Back Style](#)

3. Statement pieces: Let your statement piece show off your personality. Let it be something special. Ladies, maybe it's a studded clutch or jeweled necklace. Gentlemen, maybe it's your watch or a great pair of aviators. This is a great way to show who you are without having to have a conversation.

4. Identify your body type and go through your closet to see what's most flattering on you: See what colors work best for you. When you look great, you feel great, and in return, do great things. Don't worry about current trends, worry about what makes you look amazing.

5. Last but not least, smile: This is most likely your best asset. Happiness and positivity will put you in the right direction and will attract other people in great spirits.

A few small tweaks and you're on your way to meeting "the one." Don't forget to invite me to your wedding!

Ashley Martini, styling consultant and founding member of Martini Fashions, LLC, discreetly assists both men and women

in unearthing and exhibiting their inner beauty through style, fashion, and the top trends. Ashley is the author of the new book on style, "Styletini: Shake Up Your Style, Stir Up Your Confidence".

Ten Steps for Acting Like a Married Couple on a Friday Night



By Taylor Jenkins Reid

Before I got married, I thought married couples spent their

weekends doing things like double dates and cocktail parties. But being married has taught me that marriage is a little bit more low key. Here are 10 steps for acting like a married couple on a Friday night:

1. Get home from work and be ecstatic that you didn't make any plans. Change into your stained sweatpants.

2. Ask your spouse if they want to go out to dinner even though you know you're going to talk them into staying in. Realize there was never any chance they'd want to leave the house anyway. Remember this is why you fell in love with them.

Related: [10 Ideas for the Married Couple With Kids](#)

3. Open up the food delivery app and go back and forth about whether to get Chinese food or Pizza. Opt for pizza because, hello, it's pizza.

4. Inhale the food on the couch. Even though you both have overeaten, look at each other and say, "Do you want ice cream?" Drive to the store.

Related: [Top 5 Most Traveled Celebrity Couples](#)

5. Hold hands in the freezer section. Each of you buy your own pint of Ben & Jerry's.

6. Come home and eat ice cream while turning on Netflix. Cycle through all 100 of the movies in your queue and then say, "There's nothing to watch." You must believe this wholeheartedly no matter how absurd you know it to be.

7. Look at each other with regret that you've finished your pints of Ben & Jerry's. Be disgusted with yourself for finishing yours while telling the other one not to be disgusted with themselves for finishing theirs.

8. Settle on watching a documentary about spelling bees or

athletes. Get the blanket and pull it over you both. Place pillows under your heads. Press play. Fall asleep within the first twenty minutes.

9. Wake up when the movie is ending. Grab your spouse and lead them into the bathroom so you can brush your teeth together and then get in bed.

10. As you turn the light out, tell each other you had a great night. Because you did. After all, you just spent a solid five hours with the only person in the world that will watch you eat a pint of ice cream and still think the sun shines out of your butt. If that's not something to smile about, what is?

Taylor Jenkins Reid is an author and essayist from Acton, Massachusetts. Her first novel, Forever, Interrupted, was named one of the "11 Debuts We Love" by Kirkus Reviews, and her second novel, After I Do, will be released on July 1, 2014. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Alex, and her dog, Rabbit. You can follow her on Twitter @TjenkinsReid.

How to Make Out with a Girl





By Todd Valentine

Kissing was once the bane of my dating life. Like many of you, I was shy and worried about offending girls or making them feel uncomfortable. It took nine months of dating before I had my first kiss. Watch any romantic movie, and you'll notice that there is so much emphasis on the kiss. The kiss is the catalyst for getting physical. But, **kissing is just one step in physical escalation**, and it probably shouldn't be the first. A kiss can happen spontaneously—like on a dance floor—but typically you need to get physical in other ways first. One way is to make a move that doesn't involve kissing. If it's well received, continue. If not, back off and try again. When a woman says, "no," sometimes this really means, "not yet." Girls can be reluctant to make a move for fear of being labeled slutty, so it's your responsibility to make the interaction physical. Okay, so *how* do you actually make out with a girl? Below are four techniques that work for me:

1. Triangular Gazing

Look from her eyes, to lips, to eyes, to lips, and so on. This

should be done slowly, and ideally, in silence. It conveys that you want to kiss, and it won't get you in trouble. If she goes silent too, or leans in, kiss her. If not? Try another technique.

Related: [5 Ways to Have a Stress-Free First Date](#)

2. Eskimo Kiss or Neck Bite

The Eskimo Kiss is another move that builds arousal. Rub your nose against hers and say, "Come here—but no lips!" If she's into it, kiss her, but I would suggest pulling away. You can kiss next time. With the **Neck Bite**, you're getting physical, but the girl isn't technically a participant, so she won't feel slutty. Plus, a bite often arouses a girl *more* than a kiss. Lead with, "I need to tell you a secret," then go for a nibble.

Related: [Five Tips for Falling in Love in 2014](#)

3. Eyes-Closed Kiss

"Close your eyes. I want to show you something." She closes her eyes, you kiss her. Again, this releases the girl from feeling "slutty." Use this technique if other signals are there but she keeps shying away from kissing. The girl usually knows what you're up to but will often be glad you relieved her of the responsibility.

4. The Gangster

This is one of my favorites, but it requires courage. It works when you're not close enough to a girl to kiss her (maybe there's a table between you). Say, "sh," go silent, put down your drink, walk around the table, set down *her* drink, and kiss her. The move itself is so ballsy, and it will be less awkward to go for the kiss than to stop in the middle.

My overall advice is: **Go for it.** Girls want you to take charge. Get into a sexual vibe so she does too. Slow down,

look into her eyes, think sexual thoughts, and use **these four techniques**. If she responds well, great. If she doesn't, try again. Even if she doesn't kiss you, I promise she'll respect you for the attempt.

Todd Valentine is a global authority on attraction and seduction. For more insights on kissing and dating, check out his blog valentinelife.com and his channel [youtube.com/rsdtodd](https://www.youtube.com/rsdtodd).

The REAL Reason that Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin Split





By Sarah Christensen Fu

Unless you're under a rock, you've probably heard that Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin recently consciously uncoupled. It's a bummer—I thought they were the golden couple that would shame all other Hollywood divorcees by going the distance. The truth is that it's not surprising they split if you look at their astrological compatibility. The REAL reason they split is because Gwyneth, a Libra, and Chris, a Pisces, are **completely star-crossed**.

First, and foremost, let's take a look at Chris's horoscope (this is copied directly from *Bad Birthdays: The Truth behind Your Crappy Sun Sign*):

March 2: "Men are only as faithful as their options," said comedian Chris Rock. The Pisces ladies and gentlemen born on March 2 find themselves evaluating their options regularly, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously. They love their partner deeply but can't help but fall prey to other sets of batting eyelashes and whispered sweet words from soft, cherry-like lips. Best to lock March 2 natives in some sort of

cage if you plan to maintain a relationship with one.

Basically, Gwyn could have done everything right, and still lost her mopey Pisces poet to exotic temptations. However, Gwyneth brought her own share of icky personality traits to their relationship: she was born on September 27th, making her a vain, pretentious, wishy-washy Libra. No amount of money, class, live-in nannies, or self-righteousness, could have made this love match comfortable enough for people with this couple's sexiness and financial means to suffer through the rest of their miserable lives together.

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At the core, Libras are obsessed with the thrill of the chase. While Pisces has a deep romantic streak, they are rarely proactive hunters when it comes to romantic interests. Gwyneth basically ended up playing a pathetic, partnerless game of Cat and Mouse, which I guess is just called "Mouse." Aw. On top of that, Libras born on September 27th have a competitive, determined fire in them, which would explain why Gwyn has tried so hard to be the best mother, wife and GOOP founder on the planet. If Chris had been supportive of all of those endeavors, the two may have found a way to remain the reigning king and queen Hollywood royalty. However, in his Piscean way, Chris very likely criticized and whined about Gwyneth's stupid lentil and lemon soup and her annoying GOOP colleagues—he actually may have literally gotten sick when she told him she planned to use the term "conscious uncoupling" to describe their split.

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Sigh. They were doomed from the start. However, if you, like me, are still feeling a little low about this celebrity breakup, you should find comfort in the fact that Gwyneth

Paltrow and Chris Martin probably had hotter sex during their marriage than many, many other celebrity couples. One thing's for sure: the Libra/Pisces combination emits a whole lotta sparks before it explodes and catches fire, burning everything down with it.

***Sarah Christensen Fu** is a Virgo (incredibly high-strung and mostly a pain). She lives in Colorado with her husband and three kids, whose astrological signs cause a great deal of chaos and neuroses around the neighborhood. Visit her at www.hey-sarah.com.*

How to Turn Your Spring Fling Into the Real Thing





By Rachel Sussman

Spring is officially here and love is in the air. In order for new romances to blossom this season, singles need to face the always unpredictable and often times stressful first date. Before setting a time and place, there are some important factors to consider in order to make a good first impression on a new fling based on the helpful findings from a recent report released by ChristianMingle and JDate.

The goal of any first date is to hit it off well enough to secure the coveted second date and hopefully lay the foundation for a successful, long-term relationship. But we all know there are things we can do – and things we can avoid doing – that can help our chances in any dating scenario. In the report, U.S. singles weighed in to reveal the rules of first dates when it comes to eating, drinking and general dinner etiquette, as well as the biggest turnoffs and deal breakers when it comes to courtship. Here are the top five dating rules and deal breakers needed to turn your spring fling into the real thing:

1. Keep eating habits in check – 50 percent of singles agree that the biggest faux pas when it comes to food on the first date is being a messy eater. And think twice before ordering for a date! This is the second biggest food faux pas, as 20 percent of women don't want a man ordering for her and 17 percent of men feel the same.

2. Be mindful of cocktail consumption – When it comes to drinking on a first date, the majority of singles say one to two drinks is acceptable. And if a prospective partner gets drunk on the first date, 72 percent of men would look past it and go out with her again; though it's much tougher to get a second chance with women (only 41 percent would go out with a drunk date again).

3. It's OK if the guy pays for dinner – When reaching for the bill, two-thirds of all respondents feel the man should pay for the first date. Men tend to feel stronger about this, with 69 percent saying the man should pay, and 55 percent of women agree.

4. Take a shower and quit smoking – Hygiene is a top deal breaker for both men and women, so make sure *not* to skip a shower before a date. For men, the top three dating deal breakers are hygiene (35 percent), smoking (24 percent) and weight (14 percent); and for women, it's hygiene (34 percent), unemployment (21 percent), and a tie for third between drinking habits and smoking (16 percent each).

5. Make a good impression on their friends – If a date's friends come into the equation, making a good impression is key. The majority of singles (66 percent) would break up with someone if they didn't get along with his or her friends.

While no two dates are alike, it is important to treat the above findings as a check list in order to leave a good – and lasting – impression on any date. This spring, be sure to follow these rules in order for your next first date to

hopefully become your last. Happy hunting!

Rachel Sussman is a relationship expert and licensed psychotherapist.

Couples Therapy: A Way to Rebuild a Struggling Relationship



By Jefferson Singer and Karen Skerrett

Jeanne looked at Barry at the other side of the couch in our office. She asked him if he remembered when they were first

married and lived in a horrible one-bedroom apartment that barely had heat. Did he remember how each morning he would make her the worst coffee in the world, using a leaky filter and a banged up metal pot- how he would carry it to the bedroom while she was still just waking up? Barry nodded that he remembered. Jeanne continued to search his face, “Why is it that that coffee tasted so good to me and now we have the most expensive coffee-making contraption that money can buy, and I have to have my coffee just right, and I don’t even want you to touch the pot?”

At the heart of this exchange, Jeanne has told a “we-story”- a shared story between members of a couple that defines and guides their relationship. Jeanne told this story to remind Barry of what they have lost and need to find once more if their relationship is to improve. In our new book, *Positive Couple Therapy: Using We-stories to Enhance Resilience* (Routledge), we provide a systematic approach for helping couples recover their unique we-stories in order to strengthen and/or rebuild struggling relationships.

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Couples therapy has long focused on the problems or what is wrong with too little attention paid to identifying and cultivating strengths, or what is right in the relationship. As couple therapists with nearly 70 years of combined experience, we have learned the critical importance of redirecting couples’ attention to the affirming qualities of their relationship such as security, empathy, respect, acceptance, pleasure, humor, and shared meaning. We call these the 7 elements of We-ness (SERAPHS) and they are indeed the better angels of our relationships. Couples that feel this shared investment in each other possess the building blocks for healthy and resilient relationships, and this ingredient can be developed by finding and focusing on ‘we-stories’.

Once couples can identify a “we-story”, either recent or remote, they have a foundation that highlights what the relationship has to offer rather than what it lacks. Such a simple story can then become a metaphor, an image of what works between them and can be referred to during times of stress or challenge.

Related: [Why Looking for Love Is Like a Job Search](#)

Positive couple therapy: Using we-stories to enhance resilience provides simple and practical tools for reclaiming positive stories of connection- stories that provide a sense of hope to relationships that have become distressed. Examples of we-stories can be found on our website: we-stories.com or through [Amazon](#).

Jefferson Singer, PhD. is a Professor of Psychology at Connecticut College and in Private Practice.

Karen Skerrett, PhD. is Senior staff at The Family Institute/Center for Psychological Study and Associate Clinical Professor, Dept. of Psychology at Northwestern University.