

## Single, Dating and Looking for Love? Choose Smart!

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How many times have I heard dismayed lovers exclaim "I fell in love and I just stayed too long. I knew s/he wasn't the one! We had so many problems... all we did was fight! But I just couldn't help it..."

The frequency of that statement leads me to believe that when it comes to love, too many of us listen with our hearts rather than our heads. Think about it...we comparison-shop and investigate schools for our children, the best job, the car offering the best value and gas mileage, and we squeeze the tomatoes for ripeness. Women will shop for DAYS for the absolutely FIERCE dress and the shoes that make it all work for one big night on the town! But when it comes to choosing a mate, too many of us continually make the wrong choices...over, and over, and over again!

There really isn't a magical formula that will guarantee that you and your loved one will live happily ever after, but we can approach our next committed relationship with a clearer idea of who is RIGHT and who is just for RIGHT NOW by utilizing a few of these tips.

**Hold Off On Commitment.** Recently, my advice column received a letter from a young woman who had been "seeing" a man for 8 months; they spoke on the phone 2-3x per month. He lived a few states away, and traveled to her region of the country approximately every 4 -5 weeks. Her question to me was: "How should I approach him about a commitment?"

Thinking about a commitment in this situation made no sense. Dating seriously and seeing each other at least 1-2x a week for 6-9 months might work. But if you argue and fight all the time, WATCH OUT. Breakup to makeup could be establishing a pattern that is likely to continue once you are serious or married. Alternatively, if you DO have a serious committed relationship but have postponed taking it to the next level for a few YEARS, then you need to examine your motives for stalling. Maybe you just aren't ready to give up your independence.



**Look for The Similarities.** Numerous surveys demonstrate that people have a tendency to marry those who are like them. Yes, some "opposites attract" marriages do work, but living together under the same roof without a lot of upset is much easier for couples that have similar interests, values and attitudes. Couples that are closer in age tend to do better as well, though this dynamic has certainly changed considerably over the past 10 years with many successful "cougar" relationships (older woman, younger man).

**Sexual and Emotional Compatibility DOES Count.** Sex is a pleasurable experience, designed for a couple to openly share feelings and emotions in the most intimate way. However, if your feelings about sex are very different from your partner's, sex will not be the binding glue that should be, and these differences may cause frustration and resentment. Sexual compatibility is not just a matter of technique, because that is something that the two of you can learn as you grow together. You and your partner need to be truly attracted to one another and demonstrate this attraction with touches, caresses, kisses and lovemaking. A person who is emotionally cold and finds it hard to give or accept physical affection is a risky prospect for a deep, rich and fulfilling relationship.

**Emotional Maturity Counts Even More!** Some personality traits or behaviors are just plain bad news for long-term relationships. My dad always told me to watch how a man reacts when he is angry...that it would tell me a lot about how he handles frustration and disappointment. Does he handle it himself, or take it out on you? Does she accept her responsibility in negative outcomes, or does she usually blame someone else? Domineering, aggressive or critically sarcastic people are destructive to a loving union. Immaturity and low self-esteem also spell trouble, as these traits are usually played out in jealous behavior, a noted lack of trust, and a need for constant reassurance. An overly dependent whiner makes a mature relationship impossible to achieve.

**Flexibility and Willingness to Compromise.** Compromise is NOT one of my favorite words, but compromise, along with a willingness to change are two of the most important attributes to look for in a partner. Nothing stays the same... NOTHING. A mate that finds it difficult or impossible to compromise will find it extremely tough to meet the changing needs and circumstances of a long-term partnership. If you have doubts about the relationship, don't fool yourself into ignoring your uncertainties and believing that your partner will magically change "later after we're married." If you find yourself hoping that he or she will be less moody, less extravagant, less angry, less violently jealous, more affectionate, more attentive, more sexual - you are running a considerable risk by ignoring these feelings. If the potential for change and a willingness to freely adjust to change is important to you, look for a flexible partner BEFORE you commit yourself to the relationship, not after.

The primary ingredient for lasting success in a relationship is this one thing – your absolute certainty about it and your unwavering determination to make it work. If you have ANY fears, reservations, doubts or concerns, they will always work to prevent you from giving your relationship the 100% commitment it needs to survive and thrive.

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