

# *Dating with a Purpose*

## **The Ingredients of a Healthy Relationship**

Susan Peabody

Most of the time people are very susceptible to dating anyone who they are attracted to and who shows some interest in them. Because they are people and feel they need romantic love to be happy, they will settle for less than what they want. They will allow themselves to keep dating someone who does not want to move on to the next stage.

These days single people have dating down to a science. They know where to meet people. They have an excellent online profile that says nothing about what they really want, but is guaranteed to get someone's attention. They have the clothes they need to impress their date, and they are excellent conversationalists.

What they do not have is an understanding of how to get what they really want. They think impressing someone is enough. They want someone handsome or beautiful in their life to compensate for their own low self-esteem. They glide from one date to another hoping something magical will have. In other words, they are not dating with a purpose.

Dating with a purpose is reserved for those who are making a concerted effort to find out if there is enough compatibility to sustain a healthy relationship which includes romantic love, excitement, getting along, and a future together. In other words, dating with a purpose is like interviewing someone for the most important role in his or her life as your partner. Dating with a purpose is not easy. It takes effort, patience, self-discipline and the wisdom of others who have gone through this process themselves and been successful.

Since dating with a purpose is one of the most important things we do in life, I have created a list of things one should look for in a relationship. You can use this as a guide.

1. Honesty that engenders trust
2. Readiness for a relationship (both partners)
3. The ability to negotiate or compromise
4. Self-awareness
5. Self-esteem
6. Communication skills
7. Sexual compatibility
8. There should be a recognition of the fact that each person had a different childhood experience
9. Similar (but not necessarily identical) values: This includes such issues as money, monogamy, and parenting
10. Patience and tolerance
11. It is important to accept the fact that there will be days when the relationship seems very ordinary or even boring.
12. The willingness to substitute influencing for controlling: Saying something once and then letting it go. Being a role-model instead of nagging someone to change.
13. Healthy boundaries.
14. Devotion.
15. Quality time together.
16. Knowing when to stay and when to leave.
17. It is also important to have compatibility and “ease” in a relationship: At the same time, it must be understood that no relationship is perfect.

18. The willingness to face your problems (without over-reacting).
19. Reciprocity (give and take).
21. Realistic expectations. After the honeymoon, relationships are not a romantic fantasy.

I believe we cannot just start dating and hope that everything will fall in to place. I think we need to be honest from the beginning about what we are looking for and move on if we are not happy.

### **The Progression of a Relationship**

The proper progression of a relationship might vary but here are some guidelines:

1. Before you get started:

Develop a fulfilling relationship with yourself before you attempt to have a romantic relationship. Romantic feelings can be like a tidal wave sweeping you out to sea if you are not securely tied to a relationship with yourself. *Many of you may want to be swept out to sea, but this is not really healthy; and sometimes it is even dangerous.*

2. Selection is everything:

- Take your time;
- Do everything you can to keep from being blinded by your emotions;
- Know what you *don't* want (people who trigger your dysfunctional behavior);
- Look for someone healthy; observe them objectively before you plunge in;
- Look for someone who does not have to change very much too please you; but don't be *too* picky. Find the middle ground.

- Know what you *do* want. Make a list of the things that are mandatory and the things that are optional. Prioritize your list.

### 3. Dating:

- This is when you find out what this person is really like – any false fronts should crumble after a few dates;
- Be yourself – you want someone to know who you really are;
- Measure your compatibility during this time;
- Establish trust;
- Hold off on sex if it blinds you to what this person is really like, and keep a lid on any budding romantic feelings (you may feel them, but don't give them a lot of power by fantasizing too much);
- Be willing to change your mind if you usually "cling" to unhealthy people and be willing to hang in there if you usually "run."

### 4. Friendship:

- See if you can relax and have fun together;
- See if you can count on this person;
- Continue to see if there is enough compatibility to sustain the relationship;
- Build a strong foundation for a future romantic relationship.

### 5. Courtship:

- This is friendship combined with romance.
- Romantic feelings can now have a free reign – see if they mix well with the friendship;

- You can let romantic love blossom now – you don't have to put a lid on your feelings anymore;
- Now you can test your readiness for intimacy; this is usually the time when a fear of intimacy comes up – if you have any.

6. Commitment:

- Now things are getting serious;
- Set ground rules for the relationship;
- Discuss things like:
  - \* Fidelity
  - \* Growing closer
  - \* The future
  - \* How much time you will have for each other

. . . anything that is important to you.

7. Partnership: (This used to be called marriage, but now the wedding ceremony is optional.)

During a partnership you should:

- Maintain what you have established up to now;
- Honor the values you have in common;
- Grow as a couple, as well as individuals;
- Get to really know each other and experience intimacy. (Intimacy comes from revealing yourself to a non-judgmental partner.)

8. Switch:

- At any point in the progression of a relationship, one partner may

experience a fear of intimacy and pull back. Don't panic. Give your partner some space. However, if he or she does not come around in a few weeks, you should move on. (This is discussed more fully in *A Fine Romance* by Judith Sills.)

Now, I want to give you a word of encouragement and a warning. Intimate relationships are wonderful and something to aspire to. They can enhance your life in unbelievable ways. They can be very fulfilling and help you grow to your full potential. But always remember that they are a "want" not a "need." Your self-esteem should never depend on finding someone special.

Also, love (as attraction and desire) is not enough. Love that follows a careful selection, and is coupled with a willingness to work hard and extend yourself is also necessary.

Finally, you must not become slaves to the myth that preferential love will always span an entire lifetime. Only spiritual love lasts forever. Therefore, as *you* change, your relationship will change; and sometimes (but not always) it will fade away. You should not be discouraged by this. Change is part of life. It is what makes life interesting.

Copyright © Susan Peabody 1985