

THINGS TO REMEMBER FOR YOUR FIRST DATES (Do's and Don'ts)

BEFORE THE FIRST DATE

Waiting to be approached puts your future in someone else's hands.

While looking for someone to date, learn how to flirt instead of just cruise. Start conversations off by noticing something about the guy or what he's doing or saying, and comment on it. Open up conversations with honesty (e.g. "I haven't been here before and don't know anybody. Who are you?"). Don't pressure you or him by opening up with a zinger ("Hey, I haven't seen you here at the gym in a long time!"). After talking a few moments, take the conversation to the next level, slightly personal.

Learn the difference between flirting and conversing. The primary difference is staying power. Conversing ends the moment you feel that awkward pause and say, "Well, I'm going to go get another drink." With flirting, you ride out that awkward pause. It's doing something several seconds longer than would otherwise be appropriate. Look at him across the room – and don't look away for a split second longer than you should. You don't have to smile; just hold his eye contact. Sticking by his side, touching him a second too long, or using his name frequently may also work. This attention makes it clear you're focused on him and you think he's not interchangeable with any other guy at the party.

However, don't hover, throw yourself at him, touch him prematurely, litter your conversation with too much information, or loudly declare your interest in him. In fact, talk with him for a while and then leave to get un-nervous or take the pressure off. Later, smile at him from across the room at least once and talk to him when you're up for it.

Pay attention to his nonverbal communication. Is his body posture open to you, or has he withdrawn or turned away during the conversation? Pay attention to any "stay back" signals.

Be honest with yourself about what you want from the interaction. If you want to flirt and not cruise, do not use sexual innuendos or worse (e.g., "Are you a Top or a Bottom?").

When asking someone out, don't just offer a generic invitation (e.g., "Want to go out with me sometime?"). This makes it really hard for someone to say no and sets you up for an evening with someone who may not want to be there and who is kicking himself for not having figured out a nice way to say no. Also, he may have been thrilled to spend time with you without all the pressure of "dating" or "going out."

Always ask someone out for a specific event, especially if it's something you normally do (e.g., hang out at a coffee shop, attend a game, spend time with friends, etc.). Keep it low-pressure, casual, for a brief period of time, and not requiring lots of money. Play it as a "I like you and want to hang out with you" thing rather than "let's date." It takes the pressure off because you could be asking him to come along out of friendship and he can say yes or decline by saying, "Sorry, I already have plans for Wednesday," without it being a whole *issue*.

Never ask more than once. If he says no, he said no. (Unless he made it clear that he genuinely had a previous commitment but would have been otherwise interested.)

Don't spend hours fantasizing or getting yourself wound up in expectations before your initial date.

Ask yourself some important questions before your first date:

- Do I know what I want in a relationship?
- Have I resolved past relationship hurts and changed negative relationship patterns?
- Am I prepared for a significant relationship to come into my life at this time?
- Am I comfortable with homosexuality and with being in a gay relationship?
- Have I addressed and am I in the process of resolving issues related to my family of origin, any personal addictions, or any life trauma experiences (such as sexual abuse)?
- Have I explored any ambivalence I may have of being single vs. being in a relationship?

DURING THE FIRST DATES

First dates are not about wowing each other. Starting with your time together, dress and act as you usually do. If you present an image and that's what the other person falls in love with, then you'll be stuck trying to maintain that image. And, you won't have an authentic relationship or feel loved because it's your acting job they liked. Acting "cool" is not really cool but rather keeps people at a distance. Remember to live within your means.

Treat yourself and your date with respect. Don't cruise other guys while you're out on a date. Balance your energy and conversation between focusing on talking about you and him and on actively listening. Don't be afraid of silence. Don't criticize or try to "fix" your date. Be flexible in sharing small-talk and personal-talk.

Don't feel the need to share everything about you. Leave your date wanting more and he'll want more. Curiosity is an asset (e.g., sometimes wondering what's inside a package makes opening it far more exciting). Pay attention to developing both a friendship and a romance. Embrace mutual respect as a cornerstone of a healthy relationship.

Let yourself tune into the experience of being with the other person. Notice the process of arriving at decisions. Notice the level and quality of energy between both of you. Share honestly with yourself and with him how you genuinely feel about him and the dating process.

Don't abandon your individuality in your efforts to become a "couple" and don't try to change him to make him more compatible with you. Don't become blindly invested in your fantasies of what you want the other person to be rather than paying attention to who and how he really is.

Don't build a relationship on a cornerstone of sex. Consider not having sex until after the first three dates. It takes the pressure off you and him and allows some time to get to know one another. Plus, it won't be as awkward if the initial sexual contact is uncomfortable or doesn't work. Always practice safe sex, be aware of your vulnerabilities, and never abandon your voice if you need to say "no."

"Shake things up" by trying different approaches, activities, and routes to dating. Get out of your routines. Balance your time with each other between "doing" and "being" together.

Learn your familiar dating patterns and develop an "observing eye" to help you evaluate whether you are recreating healthy or unhealthy patterns as you progress thru a dating relationship.

Don't get attached to expectations for any particular outcome as you begin to form a relationship. Remember that your initial dates are simply to evaluate whether there is a genuine fit between yourself and the other person; dating as a popularity contest does not lead to long-term, stable, or satisfying relationships. You can't force a connection – it's either there or it isn't.

Enjoy the process of dating: “I’m going out to have fun, and if something clicks I’ll have even more fun.”

If there are dark undertones starting on a first date, step back. Even if you feel only a wiggle of doubt that keeps popping up, or a distant chime in the back of your head, listen – especially if you have a history of denying trouble. It’s important not to forsake the willpower to leave a situation that isn’t right.

AFTER THE FIRST DATES

When you begin to consider developing a first date into something more, take into account: (a) What do you *have to give* to this relationship, (b) what are you *willing* to give, (c) how much are you able and willing to receive in this relationship. & (d) *how much energy* do you have for giving & receiving at this time in your life?

Don’t think in only two categories: Boyfriend/Life-Partner or NOT Boyfriend/Life-Partner. And, don’t confuse a Date with a Boyfriend. Remind yourself that you are only going on dates and do not perceive dates as an all-or-nothing affair, where at the end you must decide if he is close enough to a soul mate to keep around. Decide only if you had fun and if he was a cool enough person to hang out with again on another date.

Create opportunities for your friends to meet your date and observe you with him; then, invite your friends to share their honest impression of you & your date and what they observed seeing you two together.

If you can tell there isn’t a fit between you and the other person, kindly say so and don’t make further plans together. Trust yourself – don’t waste your time or his. But, make sure you say no and not disappear and leave him wondering what happened to you. Above all, don’t say, “I’ll call you” after a date if you don’t mean it. Integrity is earned through acts of honesty.

Practical strategies for saying No: (a) If you can, say something positive; (b) state your position simply; (c) you are not responsible for giving a reason for saying “no”; (d) your “no” should be clear and effective, not vague; (e) as long as you are kind and respectful, you are not responsible for how the other person responds to your “no”; and (f) remember, you accept full responsibility for enforcing the meaning of your “no.”

On the other hand, don’t reject a relationship too quickly simply because the chemistry isn’t powerful and immediate. Some relationships must germinate before they blossom.

Expect a certain amount of flakiness and variety of reactions from others; we can’t be a fit for all, so don’t personalize rejection unless you are really responsible for not making it work.

Everyone has a personal type that gets their blood going, and you may not be his type and he may not be your type. It’s not your fault and it’s not his fault, and there is nothing either of you can do about it. And, remember that no one can reject you except yourself.

Be looking for date #23 (i.e., normalize that it may take a lot of dates to find your fit and you may need to keep moving and trying until you get past date #22).

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[Adapted from *If The Buddha Dated* by Charlotte Kasl, *Finding True Love* by Craig Nelson, *If I’m So Wonderful*, by Susan Page, *Gay Dating Code*, by Jim Sullivan (<http://www.gaydatingcoach.com/>), & *On Dating*, by Karen Celia Fox (<http://www.karenceliafox.com/>)].