

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESSFUL DATING



By Gayle Crist Shisler

If you aren't having the dating success you want, a recent article in *Psychology Today* says it's wise to look carefully at your "patterns of pursuit"... to uncover the beliefs and strategies that hinder you from finding a partner.

It offers seven suggestions for ways to change dating patterns that aren't working for you:

1. GET OUT OF THE HOUSE. Staying home and watching TV rarely results in a romantic chance encounter. So, you need to put yourself out there if you want to meet people. *Psychology Today* recommends you ask a trusted friend or coach to act as your social coordinator and promise him or her you'll go out. You'll also need to confront the fear of rejection or of giving up your "downtime" that hinders you from socializing.

2. IMPROVE CONFIDENCE. Next, talk to those who know you well about your self-perceptions to see if they match others' ideas about you. Usually, you'll find that you're too hard on yourself. Take to heart the nice things friends (especially opposite-sex friends) say about you, so you begin to feel like a "great catch" and can confidently present yourself for dating.

3. BE MORE OPEN-MINDED. A common reason singles don't go out is that there's a glut of available singles online, and they believe they can find an unlimited number of appropriate people from the

comfort of home. As a result, they're very choosy about who they'll date, thinking that, if one person isn't right, they can just find someone new on the Internet.

Psychologists recommend shopping for dates online the same way you do for purchases in stores: be willing to be satisfied with "good enough" rather than looking for perfection. Rather than seeking the absolute best romantic partner, commit instead to being open to a variety of options. They also say it's smart to separate real "deal-breakers" (such as not wanting kids, smoking, or emotional unavailability) from nitpicky requirements that might screen out true love (such as height, education, or income).

4. STOP CHOOSING POORLY. Another psychology-based behavior that holds singles back from dating more is a tendency to pick people who aren't right for them. Many singles have a repetitive pattern of being attracted to those with characteristics similar to the parent or past lovers with whom they had conflicts... hoping, subconsciously, to rewrite history or rework a dysfunctional family dynamic. The psyche believes it can "heal" old wounds by winning over a new lover who's like someone from the past. But this rarely works out unless both parties are totally conscious of this and willing to confront their baggage together.

5. DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH LOVE. Single women, in particular, have a tendency to expect men to conform to their fantasies. They'll often project hopes onto someone and speed up the getting-to-know-you phase of dating. This skews their ability to objectively judge prospects. As a result, they'll overlook and minimize obvious problems and let their hormones and emotions make their decisions for them. And they'll think they're in love with the man when, in fact, they're in love with being in love. This can lead to jumping into bed too soon, which prompts the brain

to release neurochemicals that spur bonding and make a woman feel more connected to and dependent on a bedmate before she gets to know him as a person.

6. NOTE CHARACTER RED FLAGS. Women often don't heed the warning signs of disrespectful or irresponsible attitudes in men and wind up getting emotionally invested with "bad boys." *Psychology Today* cautions women to keep their eyes and ears open for bad behaviors or comments, because these are likely to get worse rather than better over time. It's only fair, though, to raise any concerns with the man, to give him a chance to explain and/or modify the behavior.

7. PUSH YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR PATTERNS. Finally, psychologists also recommend stretching outside your comfort zone regarding dating. If it's comfortable for you to reject short men, say yes to the next one who flirts with you. If you tend to become overly dependent on new boyfriends, turn your phone off so you're not waiting for his next call or text message. Even if you're not immediately attracted to someone, give it some time... to see if intimate feelings begin to grow.

In conclusion, *Psychology Today* says that, when singles take responsibility for changing counterproductive behaviors, they feel empowered. And that builds confidence—the most important prerequisite for dating success. Finally, for older single women, the journal has this helpful advice: Don't evaluate men in terms of being marriage material; just enjoy and embrace what they DO have to offer. You'll have a lot more fun and, ultimately, a lot more dates. ©

Gayle Crist Shisler, M.S., is a dating coach and life coach in Doylestown. As a dating coach, she helps singles discover places to meet people their age, to improve their confidence for dating, and to have more success with online dating. As a life coach, she helps women balance work and family, get through life transitions such as separation/divorce and job layoff, or start their own small business. Gayle is also a motivational speaker, seminar instructor, copy editor, proofreader, and author of the book *How I Met My Second Husband Online at Age 50*. Information about her life coaching services is at www.healthylifeplanning.com, and info on her dating coaching services is at www.datingsuccesscoaching.com. Contact her at 215-489-0225 or coach@healthylifeplanning.com.

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