
Debunking Social Expectations and Myths About Dating



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Debunking Social Expectations and Myths About Dating

A lot of the problems that come up in dating again are generated by social expectations (how other people think you should behave or things should happen) and myths (common beliefs which are not based on fact). Having such expectations and myths can shape your behavior and reactions in ways that create dating problems. Here we will examine the most prevalent of these myths.

Myth #1: There aren't enough eligible partners to go around

Our fears often cause us to imagine the worst possible problems, and often media comes up with pseudo-facts that corroborate those fears, as in news articles that temporarily electrify the country (especially women) by stating that there are not enough marriageable men to go around. The statistics shown in these articles were later disputed, but the myth persists, because it corroborates our fears.

You only need one at a time. One thing we have a tendency to worry about is whether there are enough suitable people out there. No matter how much you hear about how few eligible men or women there are for your age range, or that all the appropriate ones are already taken, take heart. You are an individual unlike any other, and you have an advantage if you are following the dating process in *The Unofficial Guide to Dating Again*.

Out of all the people in your town or city, you only need one, and if you do what is suggested here, go to the appropriate places where you can meet suitable people, as outlined in the following chapters, your chances

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of meeting a suitable partner are excellent, and making new friends is a sure thing.

We all get somebody to love. If your family history was difficult, and you don't know what healthy relationships are, you can feel that you're doomed – relationships will never work for you. While you may need to do some extra work to correct the damage, you can still enjoy the dating experience, make some friends and even find a suitable relationship.

If you grew up in a problem family, you may worry that you don't know what a normal family interaction looks like. If there was an alcoholic, a depressed parent, a volatile or violent relationship, a missing parent, or even a foster situation, you may not have witnessed enough normal discussion, decision-making, problem-solving and affection to know how to do it in your own relationship.

Relationship difficulties caused by your lack of healthy role models might be one reason you are dating again. If your past relationship repeated your early family problems you may fear you'll never be able to love or be loved. But if you follow the right steps, you can avoid repeating those old patterns. Keep focused on your goal of meeting someone with whom you can create a loving relationship. If your problem is difficult, learning to date successfully could cause you to seek counseling or therapy. If so, good for you. You'll learn what you need to know to date again successfully.

You've got what it takes to beat the odds, anyway.

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If you're worried that the odds are against you, and that you won't succeed because few people do, you need to re-direct your thinking. Remember: you have been through difficulties before, you have learned new things before, you will survive this, and it will be worth it.

Each of your life experiences has taught you something, which means you know more than you did the last time. You are following expert advice, which will increase your chances of success. The fact that you're reading this shows that you care about the result, you're thinking carefully, and you want to approach dating again from an organized, informed point of view, which will make you more effective and successful.

In my experience as a relationship counselor, I find that people who look for a relationship after losing one, *if they do it thoughtfully and with a plan*, almost always find someone who suits them better than the last person, because they've grown in wisdom and learned from experience.

If nothing else, you'll make new friends. The best way to guarantee a good outcome in the dating process is to seek to make friends. If you set a goal to meet new friends and have good times, you'll succeed. When you approach your search as a search for friends, you can relax the stringent requirements you would have for a lover/partner. Suddenly you're free to notice everyone — because anyone could turn out to be a good friend. When you relax and open up your criteria in this way, you will be open to meeting more of the people you encounter, and to finding

out about them. Who knows, one of them may have a sibling or a friend who could turn out to be your soul mate.

Remember that “birds of a feather flock together”. In this context, that means if you find good quality people you enjoy, and make the effort to become friends them, you will meet their other friends – who will be “birds of a feather”. Most of the people you meet and like will know other people who are quite similar. Thus, every new friend can bring a network of new people, as desirable as the original friend, into your life.

Myth #2: You Only Get to Love One Person in a Lifetime

In this day of a 50% divorce rate, it’s getting harder to believe there can only be one person in the world for you, but the myth still persists. There are lots of songs, poems, and movies about the “one true love” you “can’t survive without.”

Anyone who has loved someone for a long time and then lost them naturally feels that there’s no way they can be replaced. Of course, no one who is dear to you and now gone can exactly be replaced. There are many ways to love people, and a number of people you can love. Just as you can love various members of your family differently, and just as you can care deeply about several dear friends, in different ways; so you can also find more than one person who are compatible enough to fall in love with and create a workable relationship.

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As much as you loved your last partner, you may be surprised to find that a new person has attributes and qualities you really enjoy; things you never knew were missing before.

It's fortunate that we are able to love more than one person, because it's so easy to be attracted to someone with severe problems. The point of dating is to find several people who are attractive to you, so you can sort through their character traits and foibles, until you find someone who is not only attractive, but also healthy for you. For this reason, you need to understand how to choose a relationship "from the neck up" as well as "from the neck down" — that is, using your judgment as well as your sense of chemistry and attraction.

At the turn of the last millennium, when social mores were more restrictive, and people didn't move around as much as they do today, meeting a new partner was more difficult. Today, we have more personal freedom, and neither gender has to wait for the other to make a move, or for a proper introduction. Everyone has more mobility, and a bigger population and more social outlets, to make meeting new people a lot easier. So, today the big question is not "Can I find the one and only true love of my life" but "How, out of all these people, do I choose the one with whom I can really be successful this time?"

Myth #3: Dating is only for the young

You can hear the age myth stated by people from 25 years old to advanced senior citizenship. I personally know of three ladies who met

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suitable gentlemen and got married at the ages of 78, 85 and 87. It's never too late to meet a mate.

(e) Seniors in Love Anecdotes (names are changed)

1. Rose was taking a world cruise. She would be on the ship for over three months of luxury and adventure. At 87, she had been widowed for many years, and her children were not only grown, but middle-aged. She was still active and healthy, and she wanted to take this cruise while she was still able to do it.

One day, the cruise held a party for all the singles on board, and Rose decided to go — perhaps she'd meet some new friends. As people were introduced, she was astounded to hear a man's name which recalled her past. She went up to him, and introduced herself. It was true! Robert was the very man she had dated as a young woman. Things had not worked out when they were younger, but this time they were not going to lose each other. After getting reacquainted on the ship, they were married six months later.

2. Claire had spent her entire life in obedience to her parents. She stayed home after her father died, to care for her elderly mother, who eventually became demented and difficult. Claire even ran the local post office in the small village she lived in, because she could do that from her home. She almost never went out. When her mother finally died, Claire was 60 years old, and the federal government closed her small post office, and transferred her to a post office job at the county seat.

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Here, she met George, another postal worker, and her contemporary. They began having lunches together, and developed a friendship. After a number of years, they both retired and continued their relationship. At age 78, Clara became a bride for the first time in her life, and the ladies of her small town threw her a wedding shower. Seeing her opening gifts, and holding up lovely, lacy lingerie was truly the picture of a dream come true.

3. Vera, 85 years old, had been married to a military officer, and lived all over the world. She and her husband raised several children, and had many grandchildren and even great – grandchildren. Her husband had died a few years ago, and she had moved to California to be close to her younger sister, who was also now widowed. The sisters lived close together, and traveled often together. One day, the phone rang, and when Vera answered, a voice on the other end said “do you remember me?” It was Ed, whom Vera had been engaged to when she was 18. He had tracked her down through people who knew her in their old home town. They hadn’t married because Vera had discovered that Ed had a drinking problem. He had long since become sober, married, and raised a family of his own, but his wife had died a few years before.

Vera decided to go to the nearby city where Ed lived, just for a couple of days, to meet him and talk. Her sister got a call. She was not coming home right away. In fact, she didn’t come home for two weeks. She and Ed were married six months later.

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If you ask your friends, co-workers and family members, you'll hear many more stories of people who met and fell in love at advanced ages. It's obvious from these stories that age does not have to hold you back from meeting someone to love.

It's true that when you're a teenager, an age difference of 10 or more years makes a vast difference in your experience and your outlook on life. Such a difference can interfere with communication, life goals, outlook, and relationship experience. In addition, the social reaction to such a relationship is often very negative. If one partner is underage, a sexual relationship is even against the law.

But, as we get older, life experience and emotional growth even things out. A ten-year or more difference in your ages makes little difference in how well you can conduct your relationship.

Don't focus on an arbitrary numbers difference in your ages. If you are getting along, you have good communication and problem-solving, and you love each other, that's a precious thing, and far more important than any age difference could be. And if other people have a problem with it, let it be their problem.

Myth #4: They're all losers – or I am

Many myths are based on a negative view of life and love, often because the people who promote them had negative experiences themselves. As we have discussed before, difficult family or relationship experiences can affect your view of relationships and the possibility of being loved.

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This is the very reason why I stress:

- finding quality people to date
- looking in appropriate places
- taking your time before getting emotionally involved
- interviewing new dates, and paying attention to the information you get
- using your network of friends for support, and
- checking up on the people you meet.

Anyone can meet a person with problems — they don't wear signs so it's not your fault if you meet someone who doesn't have his or her act together. However, if you stick around someone who obviously can't function well enough to be a good partner, you can fix that problem by learning to let go of bad apples. Difficult people aren't usually a problem if you keep them at a distance. They're a giant problem if you let them into your life.

Look for people, not perfection. You can be led astray if you are too concerned about categories such as wealth, education, good family, impressive career, fancy car, and designer clothes. To find a quality person with whom to share your life, you must look beyond those surface clues, and deeper into the person.

Con artists of all types know very well how to exploit appearances to lure you in and take advantage of you. If you follow the guidelines which are

fully explained in the succeeding chapters, you will not be vulnerable to people who want to take advantage of you.

Scaring yourself about molesters, rapists, alcoholics, narcissists, and other kinds of dangerous types is just another needless worry. Each person you meet presents an opportunity for you to find out who he or she is, and there are more good people than bad people out there. With a little know-how, and proper caution, it's pretty easy to recognize the difference.

Celebrate Individuality. To get to know a new person, and be known, takes a little time, because each of us is unique. We can't just say "Oh, he's a Category A, or a Category B" because people don't fit into neat, tidy classifications. You can observe someone and think "Oh, she has good manners, she must be educated," and then find out she has a problem with rage or alcohol. On the other hand, some perfect gems come in rough clothing. Many clients who are in good relationships with wonderful partners have told me "I wouldn't have looked twice at him if we hadn't gotten to know each other first." Or, "She wasn't 'my type', but after I saw her in action volunteering in the political campaign, I realized she was an extraordinary person, with great ethics, and very caring."

Each person you meet along the dating path has unique personality traits, desirable and undesirable. Giving yourself the time to get to know them enables you to sort them out.

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Don't blame a new friend for old miseries. No matter how bad your history has been, you don't have to re-create it. You can learn to interact in different ways, and to correct problems that come up. This guide is about dating correctly and successfully. If you feel out of control and unable to follow the guidelines here, you may need to work with a counselor to make the necessary changes, just as you might work with a personal trainer to correct and improve your workouts, or a nutritionist to evaluate and correct your diet.

If your background was dysfunctional and toxic, or your previous partners have been abusive or addictive, you may need to be suspicious of your first choices. That is, because of your early experience, you may be “conditioned” to be attracted to a particular character flaw. That is, the people you automatically are drawn to, and feel comfortable with initially, may be exactly the people you should stay away from. If you know this about yourself, and can resist the pull of the dysfunction, you can meet other, better people to date. If you have trouble changing this focus, counseling can help.

We're all in the same boat. Everyone who faces dating as an adult has similar worries and insecurities. It's a return of adolescent feelings from your first dating experiences.

If you're feeling bad about yourself, it's probably because you're feeling:

- Vulnerable
- Like a Loser

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- Afraid of Rejection
- Awkward, Unacceptable

If so, here's a simple truth to keep in mind: Everyone feels equally insecure about dating again. Some hide it better than others, some have been dating longer, and have become less nervous, but everyone has been through it.

If you present a friendly, pleasant demeanor and you are open to getting to know people, they will be relieved and pleased. Here is the perfect place to practice the Golden Rule — treat others exactly as you would like to be treated, and you will have plenty of good responses.

Each new situation will produce the above list of qualms, but keep in mind you're there to make friends. Find the safest-looking person in the room, and chat with them. You'll feel better, and then you can move on to greeting others. After a few minutes of pleasant conversation with new acquaintances, you will relax, and your anxieties will be forgotten.

Adapted from: [The Unofficial Guide to Dating Again](#)

About Dr. Tina Tessina

*Tina B. Tessina, Ph.D. is a licensed psychotherapist in S. California since 1978 with over 35 years' experience in counseling individuals and couples and author of 13 books in 17 languages, including *It Ends With You: Grow Up and Out of Dysfunction*; *The Unofficial Guide to Dating Again*; *Money, Sex and Kids: Stop Fighting About the Three Things That Can Ruin Your Marriage*, *The Commuter Marriage*, and her newest, *The Ten Smartest Decisions a Woman Can Make After**

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