

2023

# Dating & Relationships

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# Key Takeaways

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## Dr. Rob Stewart's Six Relationship Reminders

- 1) Follow Van Epp's Relationship Attachment Model: Know, Trust, Rely, Commit, Touch.
- 2) Healthier people have healthier relationships.
- 3) Physical intimacy that strengthens our marriages blinds us when dating.
- 4) Remember that dating should be treated like an investigation!
- 5) Involve a trusted confidante.
- 6) Allow hormone levels to return to normal before making big decisions.  
\*\* See Appendix A for Dr. Stewart's presentation slides

## Key Understandings

- Preparation for marriage begins long before the engagement. The decisions one makes as a youth/young adult absolutely will affect your marriage and your future children.
- Finding shared values and morals in the person you date is very important. Only date someone who will respect your values and morals and support you in keeping them.
- Learn how to communicate – you might have different styles of communication, so it's important to know how to talk to each other without misunderstanding each other.
- Watch how the person you are dating treats others, not just you. They want you to see their best self, but their true nature is reflected in how they treat their family and strangers (waitress, etc.)
- Make sure you want the same things/goals, like how many children to have, where you want to live, how to spend your money, etc.
- Always be totally honest. If the person you're seeing won't open up, or hides things from their past, that might be a sign of trouble.
- Find someone who is reliable and keeps their promises. The commitment of marriage is, in the end, a promise. You'll want someone who keeps theirs.
- Dating doesn't have to be expensive; go hiking, on a picnic, walk in a park, serve others together.
- Sexual intimacy should be reserved for marriage.

# Question & Answer

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To see a great list of dating questions – and answers - go here:

<https://chastity.com/qa/category/finding-love/>

**I'm dating someone, but I don't feel all the passion and emotion of being in love that I hear people talk about or that I see in movies and books. Does that mean I'm dating the wrong person?**

Love CAN be "love at first sight", but it can also grow slowly, over time. Love CAN be exciting and full of passion, especially at the beginning, but love CAN also be a calm, comfortable, and fulfilling relationship, without that heightened emotion that culture has taught should be there. Love is about patience, compromise, trust, friendship, and growth.

**My boyfriend and I have some challenges in our relationship I'm beginning to wonder if there's a deeper problem. If we were truly in love, wouldn't things go more smoothly?**

Perhaps there is a terminal problem with your relationship, but remember all relationships take effort. There will be misunderstandings and outright disagreements, but that doesn't mean one should automatically throw in the towel. Continual compromise and selflessness are required to make any relationship work. You will need to decide if your relationship is worthy of your best efforts.

**There are some things about my girlfriend that bother me. Am I crazy to think that after we're married, those concerns will be easier to resolve?**

If there is something about your partner that you really don't like, you need to evaluate if you can live with it or not – before you get married! Evaluate those concerns very carefully, because you can't make anyone change, and if you try, they most likely will just resent you for it. Realizing that the odds are what's bothering you will never be changed. This adage applies: "Go into marriage with your eyes wide open. After marriage, keep your eyes half shut." Again, you will need to be very clear-eyed about what you can – and cannot - "live with."

**I'm often told that marriage is all about "sacrifice" and "compromise." What does that mean in the real world?**

One thing that sacrifice and compromise *are not* is giving up everything you want in order to make the other person happy. Sacrifice is required of both partners. Compromise means finding a balance that meets both of your needs. That might mean some give and take, but your partner should never demand all their needs be met, without meeting any of your needs.

**I've always heard there's only one person in the world for me and I shouldn't settle until I find the "one." Is that true?**

The longstanding myth of a "soulmate" (the perfect person for me) promulgates this understanding:

"All I have to do is find the 'right' one and my life and marriage will turn out wonderfully."

If you're convinced you will eventually find that "perfect" person, you may never get married. The truth is, there are many people to whom we could be happily married. The trick is not to find the right person, but *to be the right person*. Develop in yourself the character and qualities you hope to find in a spouse.

**I've heard pornography is one of the best ways to learn about sex. Is that true?**

Pornography distorts your view and gives you an incorrect perception of what sex is. Sex is meant to bring joy and contentment within the context of loving another person and welcoming children into the relationship. Pornography only cares about one thing: the person who's engaged in it. Your focus, in a true intimate relationship, involves considering, communicating, and fulfilling the needs of both partners.

**Is "playing hard to get" is a good dating strategy?**

Rarely. Some individuals are motivated by a potential partner being difficult to attain. But generally, it's a bad strategy. Make yourself available, in appropriate ways, be willing to circulate, get acquainted with people, and be generous in your willingness to date. Be open and be yourself.

**If I find someone who is a good match for me, can I conclude that the bulk of my relationship building efforts have been completed?**

Relationship building will never end – including after you are married. The dating/engagement period is some of the best time to develop habits and patterns of thoughts that will well serve your future marriage.

## Tools and Helpful Links

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### Websites

**The Chastity Project:** <https://chastity.com/>

An exceptional resource for a person who is dating and working to develop strong relationships in life. Provides short videos, books, answers difficult questions, and provides numerous resources for dating, developing strong relationships, overcome pornography, and many other resources for building a strong foundation for a family.

**HomeFront Project – Marriage Prep:**

<https://homefront.unitedfamilies.org/units/marriage-prep/before-you-meet/>

A wealth of information on dating and marriage preparation taught through relevant and engaging articles, videos, books, social media helps and discussion questions.

**Videos:**

- 1) Relationship DUI: Are you sure you're in love?  
[https://youtu.be/yPOSG5I\\_bY4?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/yPOSG5I_bY4?feature=shared)

**Communications Expert, John Lund:**

- 1) Unrealistic Expectations:  
[https://youtu.be/Squ8SNBeEew?si=F0Y6V\\_nyKLwJ0aWt](https://youtu.be/Squ8SNBeEew?si=F0Y6V_nyKLwJ0aWt) (5:54)
- 2) What is Communication?  
<https://youtu.be/OrYicws4MY?si=zZ1YW5omu89m1QyH> (2:41)
- 3) Why “constructive criticism” will not change behavior:  
<https://youtu.be/Me3ejGchN6s?si=cG4HZwgPf5RhKDel> (4:44)
- 4) Building healthy relationships in fun and healthy ways:  
[https://www.youtube.com/live/iF0dfAb69rA?si=K\\_GgDSoTqGg\\_m0Uw](https://www.youtube.com/live/iF0dfAb69rA?si=K_GgDSoTqGg_m0Uw) (1 hr 20 min)

## Important Article

**Soulmate Marriage vs. ‘The Only One’ Marriage: Knowing the difference Matters.**

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/soulmate-marriage-vs-the-only-one-marriage-knowing-the-difference-matters?fbclid=IwAR25qc25dN7kBwHiCKKKhUhvVeVDsToOLNF6FOLrRnW7gqdD12iRCAIcsj0>

The belief in a “soulmate” suggests that someone exists as your “one-and-only” before you have even met; therefore, relationship success is primarily about simply *finding* that person. Soulmate thinking diverts attention away from the fundamental truth of loving and lasting marriage—that oneness is *made*, not found.

## Things You’ve Heard that May Not Be True

Dating can be a complex and nuanced experience, and there are several common false narratives or misconceptions that people may have about dating. These false narratives can be harmful or lead to unrealistic expectations. Here are some of them:

**Love at First Sight:**

The idea that you'll instantly know if someone is "the one" upon first meeting is a common false narrative. While initial attraction is important, love and meaningful connections often take time to develop and require getting to know someone on a deeper level.

**The One and Only Soul Mate:**

Believing that there's only one perfect person out there for everyone can lead to unrealistic expectations and frustration. In reality, there are many potential compatible partners, and successful relationships require effort and compatibility.

**Happily Ever After:**

The notion that once you find the right person, all your problems will disappear is a misleading narrative. Every relationship has its challenges, and successful ones require ongoing effort and communication.

**Opposites Attract:**

While some differences can be complementary, the idea that opposites always attract can be problematic. Shared values, interests, and goals play a crucial role in relationship success. Having common religious and cultural beliefs eliminate many conflicts and challenges in a marriage, and in determining how you will raise your children.

**Playing Hard to Get:**

Some believe that playing hard to get or using manipulation tactics will make them more desirable. Healthy relationships are built on open communication and authenticity, not mind games.

**Love Conquers All:**

This narrative suggests that love alone can overcome any obstacle or incompatibility in a relationship. In reality love needs to be accompanied by effort, compromise, and problem-solving skills.

**Online Dating Is Only for Desperate People:**

This false narrative stigmatizes online dating. In today's digital age, online dating is a common and legitimate way to meet potential partners.

**Age Equals Maturity:**

Assuming that someone's age automatically determines their maturity level is a misconception. People mature at different rates, and age doesn't always correlate with emotional readiness for a relationship.



### **Fixing Someone:**

Believing that you can change someone or "fix" their flaws in a relationship is a dangerous narrative. Healthy relationships are built on acceptance and mutual growth, not trying to change someone.

### **Love Should Be Easy All the Time:**

The idea that love should always be effortless and without conflicts is unrealistic. Disagreements and challenges are a natural part of any relationship, and working through them can lead to growth.

It's important to recognize and challenge these false narratives about dating and relationships. Healthy dating and successful relationships require open communication, self-awareness, and a realistic understanding of what makes a relationship work.

## **Questions for a Potential Spouse**

When you're dating and looking for a potential spouse, asking the right questions can help you get to know your partner on a deeper level and potentially avoid serious problems in a marriage. Consider all the implications of the answers on your future life. If these questions leave you with concerns about a potential spouse, you must never assume a marriage will change a person's desires, attitudes or behaviors. Considering this reality, are you prepared to "just live with it?" Keep in mind, however, you will never find a person with whom you align 100%, and all the time. As stated above, marriage includes some sacrifices and compromises. But, be very realistic on what sacrifices and compromises, long term, you are willing to make.

1. Why do we want to get married?
  - Understanding the motivations and expectations behind your decision to marry can help ensure you're on the same page.
2. What does commitment and integrity in marriage look like to you?
  - Consider various challenges or difficult situations and determine how commitment and integrity to your marriage impact your response. Are there conflicts in your views regarding "commitment" and "integrity"? How would you they be resolved?
3. What are our values and beliefs?

- Explore your religious, cultural, moral and personal ethics and values (honesty, integrity, etc.) to ensure compatibility. Discuss how you'll handle any differences.
4. How do you envision your life in terms of faith, religion, or spirituality?
    - What role will that play in our daily or weekly routine, and how we raise our children?
  5. Do we have compatible lifestyles and daily routines?  
Consider your habits, schedules, and lifestyle choices. Do they align? Or what conflicts might we face in regard to our differences?
  6. What is our stance on extended family and friends?
    - Discuss boundaries, expectations, and involvement with each other's families and friends. Also, what kind of support system are they for you emotionally, physically, with future children, etc.
  7. Do we want children, and if so, when?
    - Discuss your desires regarding having children, including the timing and number of children you envision.
  8. Where do we want to live?
    - Consider where you both want to reside, take into account factors like career opportunities, family, lifestyle and cultural preferences.
  9. What is our plan for maintaining intimacy?
    - Address your expectations for physical and emotional intimacy now and during marriage. How will you keep the romance alive. After you marry, you enter a new level of intimacy. Life situations and circumstances may change and may require you to readdress this issue at different times during your marriage.
  10. How will we handle household responsibilities?
    - Clarify expectations regarding chores, cooking, cleaning, and other household duties.
  11. How do we handle conflict?

- Talk about your communication styles and strategies for understanding each other and resolving disagreements constructively.
12. Are we both aware of each other's past and any potential “baggage” – deep and/or lasting issues that you may have to work with?
- Share your past experiences, traumas, and any concerns that may affect the relationship.
13. What are our individual needs for personal space and time?
- Discuss the importance of alone time and individual hobbies and how you'll balance these with your shared activities and family responsibilities.
14. What are our long-term goals and aspirations?
- Discuss your individual and shared goals for the future, including career, family, and personal growth.
15. How will we support each other's personal growth?
- Explore how you can help each other achieve personal development and pursue your interests and passions.
16. What happens in an emergency or unexpected event?
- Plan for contingencies such as illness, loss of a family member, job loss, or other crises and how you'll support each other.
17. How will we handle finances?
- Talk about your financial situations, including income, debts, and savings, and decide on a plan for managing money as a couple and with honesty and integrity.
18. What are our career and education plans?
- Discuss your individual career paths and any potential moves, job changes, or educational pursuits. Are you open to making career changes for the sake of the relationship or family?
19. Do you have any current health conditions or concerns? What is our plan for taking care of our health?
- Discuss health conditions you currently deal with and how that may impact your relationship. Discuss your general approach to physical and mental health, including exercise, diet, and healthcare decisions.

20. How will we handle social media and technology in our relationship?

- Address boundaries and expectations regarding online presence and communication.

Remember, the key to these questions is not just asking them, but also listening carefully to your partner's responses and having open, honest, and non-judgmental discussions. It's also essential to assess whether your values, goals, and lifestyles align and if there is potential for growth, sacrifice, and compromise within the relationship. Marriage is a significant commitment, so it's crucial to gather as much information as possible before making that decision.

# Appendix A

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Here you will find some of the slides from Dr. Rob Stewart's presentation. We hope these are helpful for review and guidance.

Dating is the time to prepare for a healthy marriage. Marriage has many benefits. We will discuss these in more detail at a future forum. But, here are a few.

How Marriage Benefits Adults

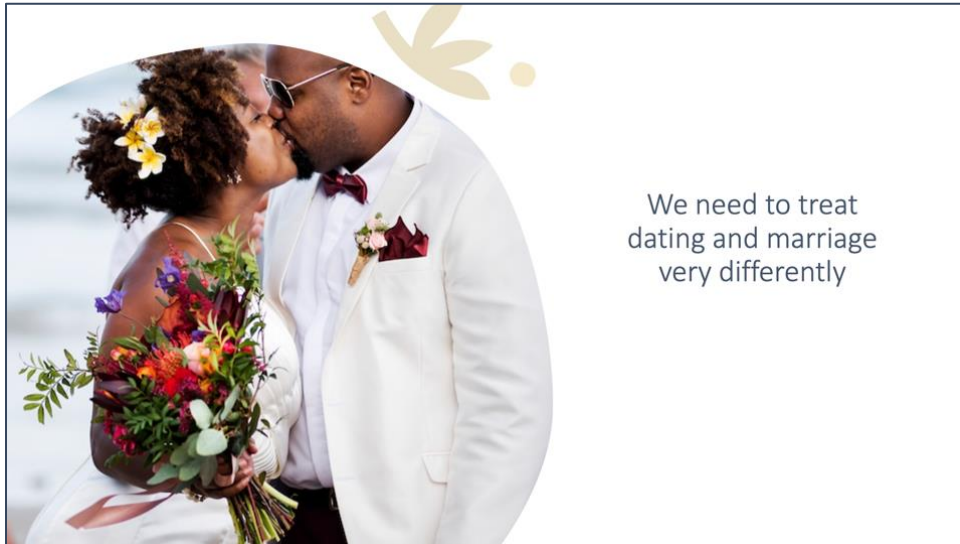
- Better Health
- Longer Life Span
- Higher Incomes

How Marriage Benefits Children

- Fewer Risky Behaviors
- Less Likely to be Abused
- Better Educational & Economic Outcomes

# How do we Get There?

Healthy Dating Leads to Healthy Relationships!

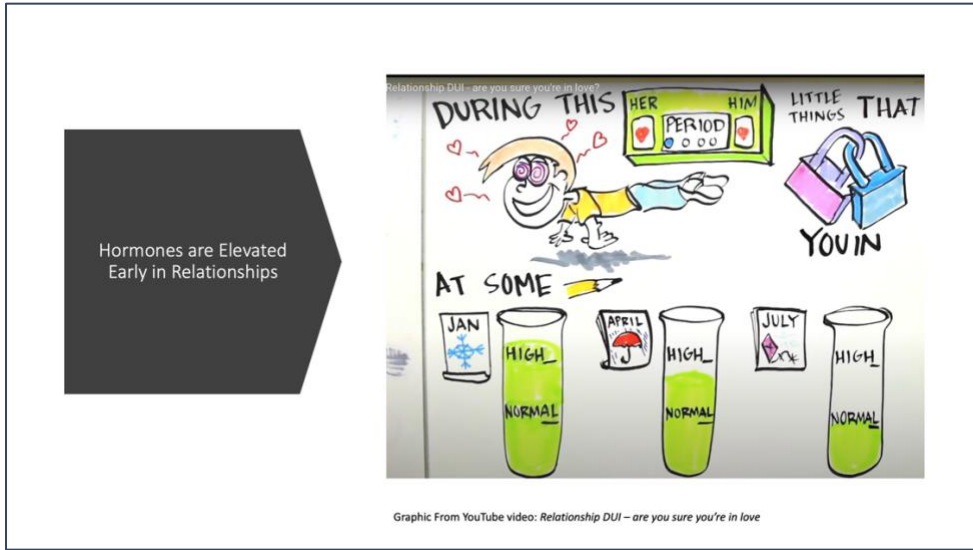


We need to treat dating and marriage very differently

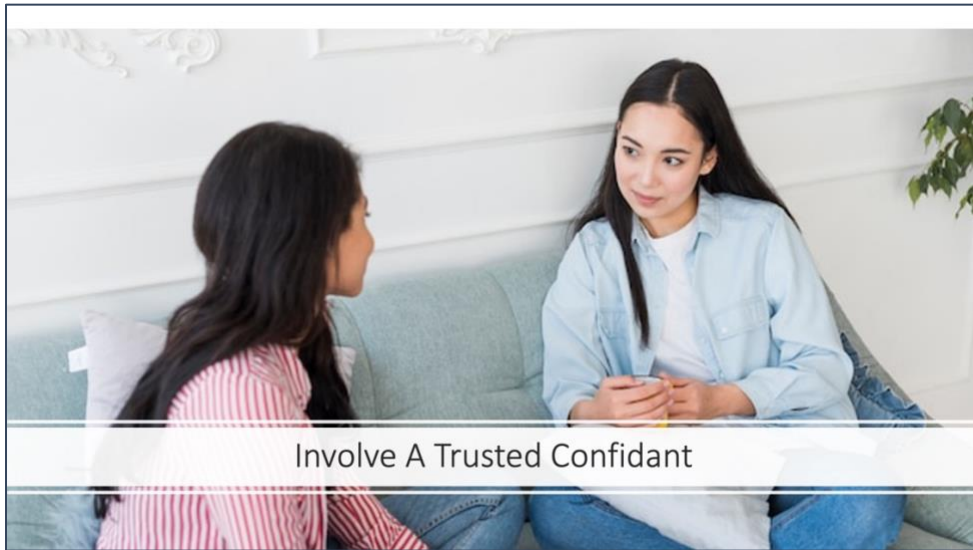
Interestingly so much of what can nourish and strengthen a marriage (a devoted commitment to the relationship, deep emotional intimacy, and a healthy sexual relationship) are extraordinarily dangerous to couples when they are dating.

Treat Dating as an Investigation

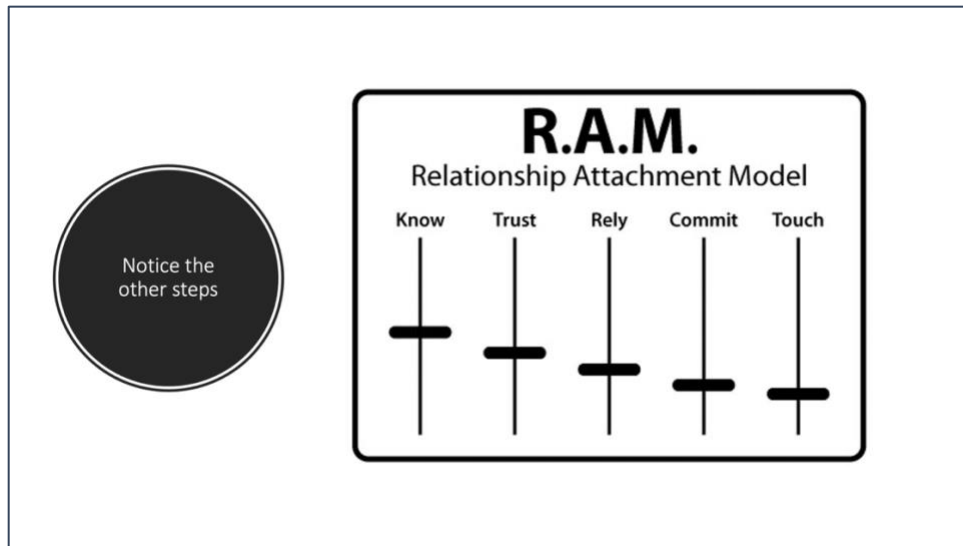




A new relationship is exciting. Additionally, hormones (dopamine, norepinephrine, and oxytocin ) are at a higher level than normal. Give the relationship some time. Wait to make important decisions until those levels have returned to normal.



Sometimes a trusted confidant can see things in you (the way you are behaving when with that person, etc.), or concerns with the other person, that you may not see due to the excitement of being in a relationship. Be open to and listen to their thoughts. Their insights can be helpful!



The Relationship Attachment Model pictured above is a simplified representation of the progression of attachment and intimacy in romantic relationships. While it simplifies a complex process, it can serve as a basic guide for understanding how relationships develop.

Here's a brief breakdown of each step:

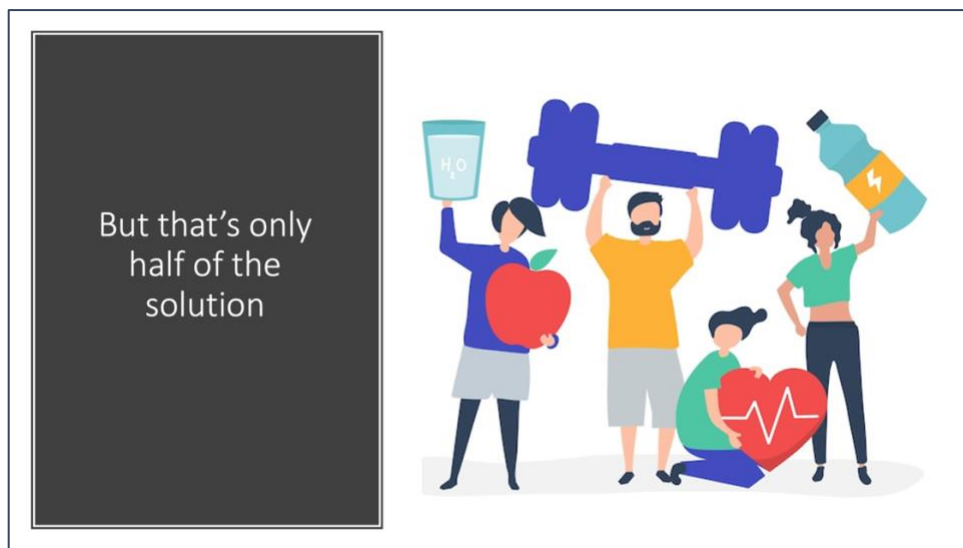
1. **Know:** This initial step involves getting to know someone, typically during the early stages of dating. It includes learning about their interests, values, and personality. At this stage, people are often assessing compatibility and attraction.
2. **Trust:** Trust is a foundational element of any healthy relationship. As the relationship progresses, individuals begin to trust each other more deeply. Trust involves believing that your partner is reliable, honest, and has your best interests at heart.
3. **Rely:** Building on trust, individuals start to rely on each other for emotional support, companionship, and other needs. This step involves a growing interdependence and the willingness to be vulnerable with each other.
4. **Commit:** Commitment is a significant milestone in a romantic relationship. It signifies a mutual agreement to be exclusive and work toward a shared future. Commitment often involves discussions about long-term goals, such as marriage, or starting a family.
5. **Touch:** Touch, in the context of a romantic relationship, represents physical intimacy and affection. This step typically includes the progression of holding hands, hugging, kissing, cuddling, and finally sexual activity. Physical intimacy can deepen the emotional connection between partners. But, if pre-marital sex



becomes a primary purpose for the relationship, it can blind us to potential problems with the relationship. Remember, hormones will be signaling to progress in physical intimacy faster than is wise. Slow down; save sexual relations for marriage.

It's important to note that these steps are not always linear, and the pace at which a relationship progresses through them can vary widely from one couple to another. People have different timelines and comfort levels when it comes to intimacy and commitment.

Communication and mutual consent are critical at every stage of a relationship. Partners should be open about their desires, boundaries, and expectations to ensure that both individuals are on the same page and comfortable with the progression of the relationship.



## What if...

I want to go on casual dates with others, but I lack the confidence?

I am not a good communicator?

I have been in previous bad relationships, and I don't trust myself going forward?

**Confidence** – Part of being the healthy person that can end up in healthy relationships is developing a healthier self-esteem.

- Strive to eliminate some bad habits.
- Be productive (productive people feel better about themselves)
- Reduce your time with your phone in general and social media in particular.
- Take care of yourself physically (proper sleep, exercise, and nutrition are all linked to improvements in confidence and self-esteem)

**Communication** – Practice, practice, practice (practice with friends, family, etc.) This will help you be a stronger communicator in your romantic relationships!

- Ensure you have more human interaction than virtual interaction.
- Train yourself to be a good listener (that can be a very attractive quality)
- Work to be an empathic listener where you truly try to feel and understand what the other person is sharing.
- Have the confidence to share your thoughts – but be cautious to not monopolize conversations.

**Relationships** – The past is past, but the principles shared can increase the likelihood of success in the future.

- It is important that you believe you deserve and can have a healthy, happy relationship.
- Avoid self-fulfilling prophecy. If you expect everything to go wrong, you might put in less effort or fail to take the steps needed to get to know the other person – or be open to changes to make the relationship successful.