

❧ Chapter Six ❧

Bumping Up the Yield

The Techniques of Dating

Great dating is not a technique. It's a natural result of two people who are willing to be honest and accepting. As you're learning to be open and loving, however, there are some details about dating that will help you make the experience as rewarding as possible.

WHEN TO DATE

Although we briefly discussed in Chapter Four the need to have some measure of Real Love before we date, this subject is so important that we'll talk more about it here. Productive dating requires honesty and the presence of Real Love. With that in mind, don't begin to date

- when you feel empty and afraid. In that condition, you *will* manipulate your partner for Imitation Love, and you'll protect yourself, making a loving relationship impossible.
- too soon after the failure of a relationship. Right after a break-up, you'll be so needy that you won't be able to avoid clinging, manipulating, and so on. Especially in the case of a divorce, wait long enough that you can date without any

hint of desperation. I usually recommend that people wait a year after a divorce before they begin dating.

- when you're in the middle of a crisis: You lost your job, your dog died, your house was swept away by a hurricane. Not good times to begin a relationship.
- when you're physically not well. Women, for example, should never date during a time when the likelihood is high that they'll be suffering from premenstrual syndrome (PMS).

What if you're already dating? If you don't already have enough Real Love from friends and family—enough that you are largely free of emptiness and fear—it's virtually a certainty that you're having considerable difficulties in your present relationship. In that case, it's usually wise to break off that relationship and get the Real Love you need to be healthy and happy. Once you feel unconditionally loved, you'll have the tools to date in a healthy way. Shortly we'll discuss an example of someone who learned this principle. Chapter Nine provides a more detailed discussion of what to do with an already difficult relationship.

Let me suggest that you ask yourself the following questions to help you determine whether you're ready to date:

- Do I feel lonely?
- Do I worry that I'm not having enough dates?
- Do I worry about what my partner will think of me?
- Do I feel like I *need* a man? Or need a woman?
- Am I looking for somebody to make me happy?
- Will I be crushed if my date doesn't ask me out again?
- Do I worry about how I look and what I'll say when I'm on a date?
- Am I heartbroken about a recently lost relationship?

If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, your emptiness and fear will cause you to seek Imitation Love and will significantly distract you from the kind of relationship you really need or want.

How To Prepare To Look For a Partner

Before you're capable of finding a healthy intimate or exclusive relationship, you must eliminate your emptiness and fear—not completely, but to a large extent—with Real Love. You can get that love from *anyone* who has it, as Sandra learned in the following discussion.

Sandra: I've been dating William for several months, and it just doesn't seem to be working out. We're always arguing, and I don't know what to do.

Me: What you really want is a mutually loving, *unconditionally* loving relationship, right?

Sandra: Yes.

Me: That takes two loving partners, and you don't have nearly enough Real Love in your life to participate in a loving relationship.

Sandra: So what can I do?

I described the process of finding Real Love, and suggested that she start telling the truth about herself to some girlfriends and family members.

Sandra: But what about William?

Me: I can't tell you what you should do with a particular partner, but I *can* tell you the pattern I've observed with hundreds of other couples. Right now you need to feel more Real Love in your life, something you've been missing for a long time. It's the most important goal you could pursue, and you need to avoid anything that might get in your way. With your own experience, you've already proven that it's very unlikely you could have a genuinely loving relationship with William. You're not ready to be unconditionally loving, and neither is he. If you stay in a relationship with him now—while you're

empty and afraid—you will not be able to avoid having huge expectations of him, and those expectations will seriously distract you from your goal of feeling Real Love. You'll be too disappointed and irritated when he doesn't give you what you need.”

If you're not married, and you don't have enough Real Love to participate in a mutually loving relationship, the most important goal you could pursue is to find Real Love for yourself, *not* to find or preserve a relationship with any particular partner. It's usually not productive to keep trying to repair a relationship—other than marriage—that's not unconditionally loving. Instead, recognize that you're not ready for a dating relationship, and then learn how to find the Real Love you need from friends. When there is insufficient love in a relationship—other than marriage—it's usually wise to break off that relationship and get the Real Love you need. We'll talk in Chapter Nine about how to end relationships that aren't working.

∞ Do not date until you have enough Real Love in your life that you have largely eliminated your emptiness and fear. Otherwise, you will be desperate for Imitation Love, and will ruin every relationship you begin.

I'm sure you noticed in the above paragraph that I set marriage forth as an exception to the rule three times. Why the exception? In marriage, we've made a lifelong commitment to stay with our partner even when things are difficult. That is not a commitment to be broken lightly. Although it is often more difficult to move forward in the process of Real Love while still in an unhappy marriage, with guidance the process is still quite fruitful in the vast majority of cases.

You can read a great deal more about the application of Real Love in marriage in the book, *Real Love in Marriage—The Truth About Finding Genuine Happiness in Marriage*.

Don't Date Until You're Really Ready

The solution to Sandra's situation is not for her to leave William and then immediately fill his place with another man. She needs to get sufficient Real Love from other *women* and from men for whom she feels no sexual attraction. She probably won't be prepared to date in a healthy way for many months, or longer. If she starts looking for an exclusive relationship before she is sufficiently whole and loving, she *will* have another unhappy experience.

When we leave a relationship that's not working, we tend to dull our pain by replacing it with yet another relationship that won't work. We'd rather have *some* attention—even if it's not based on Real Love—than no attention at all. All our lives, most of us have been using other people for the Imitation Love they give us, much as we'd use an addictive drug. When we break up with a partner, we often experience the terrible discomfort of withdrawal. To eliminate that pain, we go back to using our drug—the praise, power, and pleasure we get from other people—and then we're stuck in a cycle that never ends.

The best way out of this addictive trap is to step completely out of the cycle. We have to make conscious decisions to avoid using people for the Imitation Love they give us, even when we feel empty and alone and desperately need a "fix." If you feel like you really *need* a woman (or man) in your life, you're not ready to date.

HOW CAN YOU MEET MEN?

HOW CAN YOU MEET WOMEN?

There are many places where you can meet other singles:

- School
- Work
- Church groups. Most churches now have singles groups.
- Professional matchmakers