

## Romantic Relationships: Stop Dating People Who Are Not Right For You

Activity: Create 4 lists of personality traits and physical characteristics.

Purpose: To clarify what is most important in a potential dating partner and/or mate.

Materials Needed: 1 piece of paper and a pen or pencil.

One of the most important things we do in life is choose a life partner. But very few of us are ever taught how to go about this by parents or relatives, beyond something like: “Choose someone who is a good person.” While well intentioned, this instruction is vague at best. Even worse are the “pointers” often found in women’s magazines on “how to catch a man.” The only time it is a good idea to “catch” someone is if you want the person to feel like a trapped animal in the relationship. It is far better to *attract* someone who is really right for you. A relationship build on mutual attraction is much more likely to succeed and be satisfying for both people.

In order to find the right person, you have to have a clear understanding of what you are looking for. While this sounds like common sense most of us give too little attention to such an important and life altering task. In this exercise, you will construct four lists, which will serve as your personal road map to stop dating people who aren’t right for you and start exclusively dating people who are.

On a piece of paper, create four columns. At the top of each column, write the following titles: What I *have to have*: I can not live without it; What I prefer, but am flexible on; What I *can not* live with; What I prefer to not have, but am flexible on.

Start with the first column: What I *have to have*: I can not live without it. This is where you will list everything your ideal person **MUST** have, including personality traits and physical characteristics. If it is important that you never are lied to, then put “Honesty” in this column. Similarly, if it is important that the other person do what they say they are going to do when they say they are going to do it, then write that in the first column also. As you write words or phrases in the first column, you will begin to notice that a few of these are really preferences. You may prefer the person be tall, but realize that, while that is your preference, you are willing to be flexible. As you realize these preferences, write them in the second column.

Once the first column is complete, move on to the second one: What I prefer, but am flexible on. It is likely you will already have a few items on this list because you initially wrote a few things in the first column and have since moved them over. Complete this column as you did the first one, focusing this time on personality traits and physical characteristics that are truly preferences.

The third column is What I *can not* live with. It’s common for some things to be written in this column as a sort of mental response to the first column. For example, you may write “Honesty” in the first column and automatically write “Lying” in the third column. While this is OK, the exercise will be more helpful if you fill in items in this column without referring to the first one. Finish this one and then move on to the final column.

The fourth column is: What I prefer to not have, but am flexible on. Again, you may find that some items you initially put in the third column fit better in this one.

Once you have finished all 4 columns, read them over to see if you think they are complete. It can be helpful to put the lists aside for a few days, then read them over again to see if anything new comes to mind.

These lists are good to use from the *very beginning* of a new relationship. Starting with the *first date*, compare what you have now learned about this person to what you have on your list. If this person does not meet the standards on your personal list, then don't go out with him/her any more. It is that simple. The person you went out with may be a fine individual. But he or she does not meet the criteria you have established for yourself. So don't waste any more time; move on to the next person.

Sometimes after the first date it may seem like this person is a good match for you because you don't know anything about the person that is in *conflict* with your priority list. That does not mean that you should put the lists away – either literally or mentally. Keep returning to your lists after dates and phone calls, or phone calls that are suppose to happen but don't. Ask yourself this: “Is this the behavior I would expect from someone who meets the criteria on my lists?” If the answer is ever “No,” then move on. Not moving on when you should will keep someone in your life that is not right for you. When someone who is not right for you is in your life, there is *no room* for the right person. You have to make room for him or her by getting the wrong person out of your life and off your calendar.