

Should I play by the rules?

by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

Sometimes, the whole dating game really *can* seem like a game

It all starts when you find yourself attracted to someone you've met through work or friends or in a bar – or perhaps online. Maybe it's someone you've known for a while, but who you'd never got past the stage of just being friendly with.

It's taking things to the next stage that so often gets complicated. If only it could always be as simple as: 'I like you and you like me, so let's get it together'.

The not so simple truth

Well, human beings are complex creatures. We all feel we have to get to know someone before we establish a relationship, so we set each other a series of little tests. It's these tests that form the dating ritual with its unwritten social rules. Our behaviour in these situations is dictated very much by these rules as well as by our own personalities and insecurities.

At first sight

Some people claim to have fallen in love with their partner at first sight. But if you declare your love the moment you meet, the other person is either likely to write you off as a little weird, or maybe assume it's a very cheesy chat-up line. And our own fears of rejection often prevent us from acknowledging the power of our feelings until we sense they are likely to be reciprocated. If, after a first date, a woman tells her friends that she has met the love of her life, the man she wants to marry, they might just assume she's lost it!

Hide and seek

The all-important first date is usually followed by a period of 'just seeing each other'. This is when we tend to adopt a 'safe' format in our style of communication – even if we've fallen head-over-heels for the other person. We certainly show caution in using the words 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend'. It's even possible for us to see other people over the duration of the next few dates or the next few weeks. The uncertainty can make the situation frustrating, even agonising, but we need to follow the rules – to protect ourselves and to avoid scaring a potential partner away.

These days, sex doesn't clarify the situation either. You could have fantastic sex straight away, and you still wouldn't know whether you're in a relationship, or you could hold off for much longer only for things to go wrong at a later date. As so often, the only answer is to trust your instincts on sex and behave in the way you feel is right for *you*. Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules on this one.

Play it your way

The rituals of dating can seem confusing, but they aren't set in stone: there is a range of 'normal' behaviour in the early stages. And you should think about using them to your advantage; this will help you stay positive and optimistic. Don't go crazy waiting for a call to be returned or wondering whether you said or did the right thing. It's not going to go your way every time – there will inevitably be downs as well as ups. So try thinking of the dating game as a tried and tested method of weeding out the people who aren't right for you.

If you're not 100% sure, remember that the other person probably isn't either – but if you sense potential, it's worth giving things a chance. Don't blow things up in your mind, though. After all, how many people are ready to make a lifelong commitment after just a few dates?

Do you have any questions that you would like to see discussed in future editions of the PARSHIP newsletter? Then contact Dr Lukats at drlukats@parship.co.uk.*

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If you want to meet the love of your life, visit www.parship.co.uk and take PARSHIP's free compatibility profiling test.

*Any reader questions that appear in the PARSHIP.co.uk newsletter will do so anonymously. Unfortunately, PARSHIP.co.uk and Dr Victoria Lukats cannot enter into personal correspondence on relationship issues raised by readers.

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