

The art of flirting

by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

Flirting is a subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) way of showing that you are sexually interested. It's all part of the mating game.

But what if you're not too good at reading the signals and can't quite make out whether someone is interested in you? Or what if you yourself are just too shy to send out clear signals?

Testing the waters

The language of flirting is based on those unwritten social rules that play such an important role in the early stages of a relationship. Sexual attraction is rarely a question of all or nothing – of “I want a serious relationship with this person” versus “this person doesn't do a thing for me”. The physical attractions of a potential partner might be obvious, but the big question is whether you want to take things further. An initial conversation can establish whether there's any chemistry or connection. Both parties need to test things out with a bit of fun and flirting – and possibly some serious conversation too.

Just a bit of fun?

Of course, it's perfectly possible to enjoy some flirtation without the slightest intention of taking things any further ... Think of those times when you've engaged in some mild flirting just for the fun of it – perhaps you were already in a stable relationship or you were chatting with a married colleague or a complete stranger. This kind of thing is completely normal, provided that it's not taken too far, with both people understanding that flirtation is not some kind of sexual green light. Done in a friendly, non-sexual way it isn't predatory and can be perfect for testing the chemistry between two people

Flirting: a user's guide

Now for a few pointers on when and how to flirt. Take a first date, for example. If you went into heavy flirting mode from the word go, it might appear a bit odd, so it's important to read the other person's signals (body language and what they're saying) and to start off slowly.

The key to flirting is the **body language** that accompanies the conversation. Simple signs can show someone you're interested. Check whether the other person is leaning towards you and seems to be really listening to what you're saying. They might be mirroring your own posture and they should be talking in quite an animated way. Smiles and lots of eye contact are also good clues, as are little hand gestures (turning the inside of the wrist towards you, for instance) or playing with their hair.

Turning up the heat

So much for the initial signals. The next level of flirting is more playful and might involve some teasing. A slightly provocative question, posed with a cheeky smile and a raised eyebrow, maybe with the head turned slightly downwards – all accompanied by constant eye contact – would definitely be a consciously flirtatious signal. And if the flirting is going a bit further, veiled mentions of sex will enter the conversation ... “Who's your type?” ... “What do you find attractive?” ... “What gets you going?” You don't have to adopt *Carry On*-style innuendo to make your point.

And then there's the **physical contact**. If you really want to flirt a little more strongly and test things out, then you'll get the message across by touching your date's arm to emphasise something you say. Accompany the gesture with a smile and some prolonged eye contact and you should get your point across. Before you take this route, however, you must feel confident that your date has been sending out the right signals: you don't want to be seen as intruding on his or her personal space. You should feel able to trust your instincts on this and do what feels natural.

So, while flirting can just be a bit of innocent fun, it usually indicates some degree of sexual interest – even if you have no intention of taking things any further. Some people find that it adds to the thrill of the chase – and what's more exciting than the bubbling chemistry between two people who are yet to have their first kiss ...?

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.*

Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc works as a psychiatrist.

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.

© PARSHIP GmbH 2006