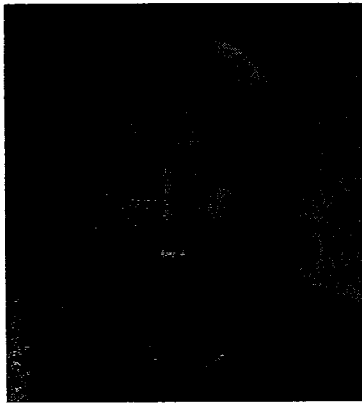


Date Safely & Successfully



By Teresa Acosta

Many women might agree with author Flannery O'Connor's well-known adage that "A good man is hard to find." However, Dr. William Seefeldt, a Cupertino-based clinical psychologist suggests methods for dating that will help weed out the not-so-decent and increase your chances of dating kind, caring and available men.

"It's scary out there," says Heidi, a single 41-year-old woman, who's been dating for nearly two decades. "I seem to run into the only dysfunctional man in the room and end up dating him."

Dr. Seefeldt defines dating as socializing with someone in order to consider him or her as a possible romantic partner. "Dating is meant to enhance what you already have and enjoy in your life," says Dr. Seefeldt.

The most important choice we make is who we're going to partner with. The impact of that choice is enormous. Women need to put more preparation time into dating than they do shopping: make a list.

"Love is about respect and caring. Don't let anyone tell you or treat you otherwise," says Dr. Seefeldt, whose 10 goals and guidelines for healthy and safe dating will help you date with confidence.

GOAL #1 • Free yourself from old, less effective ways of coping.

Learn from experience. Identify past issues and obstacles that have resulted in relationships not being safe or working for you. The only behaviors that you can directly change are your own.

GOAL #2 • Stay alive.

Safety above all else. Dating can be a life-or-death issue in today's world. Protect yourself no matter what the circumstances, situations or persons. Get to know a person well. If someone ignores your requests and boundaries, you are not being appropriately valued. Seek safety as your priority.

GOAL #3 • Always operate from choice.

Take responsibility. "Responsibility" is the ability to respond. You have CHOICE. Decide how you will focus your energy. Be a powerful, mature, genuine and loving "agent of change."

GOAL #4 • Build healthy relationships.

Do the right thing. Choose self-respect. You must act from the premise that you're valuable when you are in doubt or fearful, whether you feel valuable or not.

GOAL #5 • Improve the exercising of your choices stemming from respect of your feelings.

Respect yourself. It's appropriate to expect and demand respect and

GOAL #6 • Learn to cope with day-to-day dating issues and problems.

Recognize and know your needs and strengths. List the practical skills and strengths that you already have or that you have demonstrated in past dating and relationships. These are your foundation from which to build your future efforts. Be able to rely on yourself.

GOAL #7 • Protect yourself from destructive people and situations.

Watch for Red Flags. Red flags are alerts to check further, cautions against threats to your boundaries or needs or realities that this may not be the kind of person for you to associate with. Some red flags may turn out to be minor; others demand you take immediate protective action.

GOAL #8 • To not hurt yourself or others.

Have Timelines and Boundaries for yourself and with others. Know ahead of time which needs, wants and desires of others you are willing to respond to and which you are not. Exercise choice beginning with consideration of yourself. Be clear as to your boundaries about time, location, travel and safety. Don't be talked out of your choices. Leave word with someone as to who and where you are meeting the person. Initially, make contact in a neutral public place and for a limited time. Arrive and leave separately.



A PARTIAL LIST OF COMMON RED FLAGS

- Lack of empathy
- Temper
- No sense of humor
- Disrespect
- Substance overuse or abuse
- Bad driving habits, esp. speeding
- Distortions
- Workaholism
- Disregard of self or others
- Inability to listen to or hear you
- Lack of compassion
- Prejudice
- Risky behavior
- Woundedness
- Self-centeredness or too much ego
- Co-dependency
- Obnoxiousness
- Controlling
- Low self-esteem
- Extreme dysfunction
- Enmeshment
- Uneasy feeling in your "gut"
- Impersonal sex with one partner after another

guard from yourself and from others. Identify options, alternatives, risks and what support you might need to move your intentions into constructive behaviors.

GOAL #9 • Increase your functioning related to socializing and dating.

Plan. Know what healthy dating and relationship is for you. If you are unsure, do some research. Create relationship goals that result from your needs, previous experiences and awareness you have developed in approaching dating more consciously. Make a plan with goals, rewards and a time to evaluate and re-plan.

GOAL #10 • Attain stability related to socializing and dating safely, while having healthy fun.

Practice and Participate. Do the things that leave you satisfied, are fun for you, make you happy and address your needs.

Practicing is exercising your participation in life with the intention and commitment to be safe and to enhance your living and loving. Celebrate yourself, your efforts and successes.

And remember, you are seeking someone to share your most valuable asset—yourself.

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