

Love Addicts Anonymous Dating Plan

What to look for in a healthy relationship . . .

1. Honesty that engenders trust.
2. Readiness for a relationship (both partners).
3. The willingness to negotiate or compromise.
4. Self-awareness—this means both partners knowing who they are and what they want.
5. Self-esteem—this means both partners feeling good about themselves.
6. Communication skills.

This means:

- Asking for what you want, but not being addicted to getting it.
- Fighting fair. (This means expressing your opinion without attacking the other person.)
- Reporting your feelings.
- Saying what you mean (not beating around the bush).
- Listening, as well as talking.

7. Sexual compatibility. This means similar values and preferences.
8. There should be a recognition of the fact that there are 4 people in the relationship—2 adults and 2 children (1 inner child per adult).

This means:

- That childhood wounds will probably be triggered and sensitivity strategies must be created.
 - That rituals from your family of origin must be re-negotiated and new rituals created as a couple.
 - And, finally, that the wounded inner child must be kept in check. (In other words, love your inner child, but don't give him or her the keys to the car.)
9. Similar (but not necessarily identical) values about such issues as money, religion, monogamy, and parenting. This avoids needless conflict. Still, you don't have to agree about everything—just what's important to you.
 10. Patience and tolerance, but you should never tolerate abuse.
 11. It is important to accept the fact that there will be days when the relationship seems very ordinary or even boring. Many people tend to have an “all or nothing” mentality. They either want a relationship to be exciting all the time, or they live with unbearable pain rather than move on. Healthy relationships are sometimes lukewarm.

12. The willingness to substitute “influencing” for “controlling.”

This means:

- Saying something once and then letting it go.
- It also means being a role-model instead of nagging someone to change.

13. The willingness to keep your personality boundaries (even when you feel like losing yourself in the other person). This is how we maintain our self-esteem.

14. Devotion. How can an intimate relationship feel good if we aren't special to each other.

15. Quality time together. At the same time, you want to set aside time for personal interests. Look for balance.

16. Knowing when to stay and when to leave. This means staying when things are going well (and you feel like running), and being willing to let go of the relationship if it is unhealthy.

17. It is also important to have compatibility and “ease” in a relationship. At the same time it must be understood that no relationship is perfect. (Compatibility comes from being alike or from having a high tolerance for your partner's differences.)

18. The willingness to face your problems (without over-reacting).

19. Respect and admiration, but there should also be an understanding that your partner will not always look good to you.

20. Reciprocity (give and take), but you should also be willing to make sacrifices now and then.
21. Realistic expectations about how much of your happiness should come from the relationship—not too much and not too little.

Progression of a Relationship

The proper progression of a healthy relationship may vary but here are some guidelines:

1. Develop a fulfilling relationship with yourself before you attempt to have a romantic relationship. Romantic feelings can be like a tidal wave sweeping you out to sea if you are not securely tied to a relationship with yourself. Many of you may want to be swept out to sea, but this is not really healthy, and sometimes it is dangerous.
2. Selection is everything.
 - Take your time.
 - Do everything you can to keep from being blinded by your emotions.
 - Know what you don't want (people who trigger your dysfunctional behavior).
 - Be willing to change your mind if you usually “cling” and be willing to hang in there if you usually “run.”
 - Look for someone healthy, and observe them objectively before you jump in.

- Look for someone who does not have to change very much too please you.
- Know what you do want. Make a list of the things that are mandatory and the things that are optional. Prioritize your list. Make sure you include things like availability, compatibility, honesty.

3. Dating:

- This is where you find out what this person is really like. Any false fronts should crumble after a few dates.
- Be yourself. You want someone to know who you really are.
- Measure your compatibility during this time.
- Establish trust.
- Hold off on sex if it blinds you to what this person is really like, and keep a lid on any budding romantic feelings. (You may feel them, but don't give them a lot of power by fantasizing too much.)
- Be willing to change your mind if you usually “cling” to unhealthy people and be willing to hang in there if you usually “run.”

4. Friendship:

- See if you can relax and have fun together.
- See if you can count on this person.
- Continue to see if there is enough compatibility to sustain this relationship.

- Build a strong foundation for a future romantic relationship.

5. Courtship:

- This is friendship with “an understanding” that things are going to become romantic.
- Romantic feelings can now have a free reign. See if they mix well with the friendship.
- You can let romantic love blossom now. You don't have to put a lid on your feelings anymore.
- Now you can test your readiness for intimacy. This is usually the time when a fear of intimacy comes up—if you have any.

6. Commitment:

- Now things are getting serious.
- Set ground rules for the relationship.
- Discuss things like fidelity, growing closer, the future, how much time you will have for each other. . . anything that is important to you.

7. Partnership:

During a partnership you should:

- Maintain what you have established up to now.
- Honor the values you have in common.

- Grow as a couple, as well as individuals.
- Get to really know each other and experience intimacy.

8. Switch:

At any point in the progression of the relationship, one partner may experience a fear of intimacy and pull back. Don't panic. Give your partner some space. However, if he or she does not come around in a few weeks, you should move on.

Adapted from *Addiction to Love* by Susan Peabody