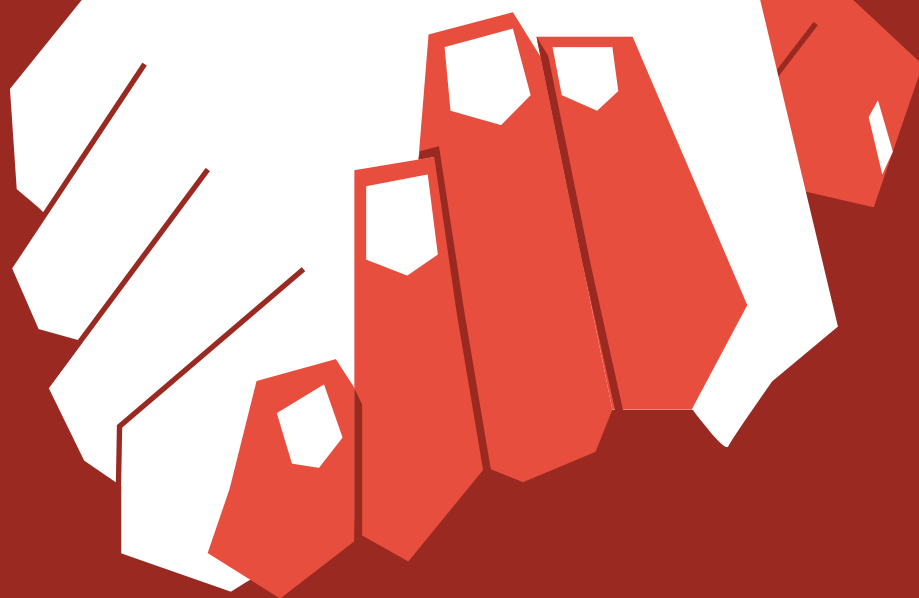


I WANT TO START
**DATING
AGAIN**



I want to start dating again but I don't know how

When you've been out of the game for a while, going on a date can be as terrifying a prospect as meeting the three-headed hell hound at the fiery gates.

You tend to visualise your inevitable humiliation – the spilling of a drink, the toilet paper stuck to the shoe sole, the awkward first kiss – because when you're out of practice, dating becomes synonymous with absolute terror.

And no-one's saying it's easy, but you can think and act in certain ways to make it easier.

What to do

Be ready

Don't start dating if you still feel heartbroken, give yourself time to recover, and make sure your happiness doesn't depend on meeting someone.

Let go

Say goodbye to Mr and Mrs Right. There's no such thing. And by holding out for them you'll only disappoint and limit yourself.

Get connected

Try out online dating if you haven't already.

Enjoy anonymity

Acknowledge how good you've got it. Revel in the fact you don't have to call up potential dates on the landline.

Beware certainty

You'll never know for sure that someone's 100%

right for you. Be prepared to relinquish certainty and take a leap of faith.

Get active

Visit doingsomething.co.uk for alternative date ideas, because the old candle-lit dinner thing's becoming a bit old hat.

Remember your manners

Revise the rule book – don't be late and take your phone off the table.

Be intuitive

Use your intuition to see what's appropriate conversation-fodder, and steer clear of anything too controversial.

Enjoy the ride

The healthiest daters appreciate dating for dating's sake. Savour the opportunity to learn about new people and visit new places.

Be ready

Getting into dating when you're not ready can be a messy affair. If you're racked with low self-esteem, the process of looking for a new partner could mire you even further. The trite adage of loving yourself before you can love anyone else is especially applicable when it comes to dating.

Approach dating with a healthy mindset. For example, if you frequently think things like 'I won't be happy until I find someone', rephrase it to be: 'I'd prefer to fall to love with someone, but I know I might not, and my wellbeing isn't dependent on that happening'.

If you're unhappy in yourself, you're more likely to blame a bad date on your own failings, rather than just accepting it as an inevitable part of the dating game.

On the other hand, if a date goes well and ignites a romance, you're more likely to pile your insecurities into that fledgling relationship and inhibit its chances of blossoming. Learn to draw happiness from your own life before seeking it in somebody else.

Let go

Once you're greased up and raring to go, the first thing to do is forget about Mr or Mrs Right. Do it right now. Watch their smug faces sail over the horizon and into the night. Why? Because they're a figment of the human imagination, and demanding a certain set of qualities in someone you haven't even met yet will leave you not only disappointed, but limited.

Beyond the confines of your concept of 'the perfect other' is a whole world of untapped variety. Suck it and see - you might find you cherish great bantering skills over 'on-paper' credentials, or intellectual ambition over a full head of hair.

Get connected

Some people have a hard and fast aversion to internet dating. Maybe you think those sites are full of losers who can't get a date in the real world. Maybe the idea just doesn't fit your romantic ideals.

Try having a non-committal hop-skip-and-jump around Guardian Soulmates. You can browse profiles anonymously without signing up, and you'll see pages and pages of successful, attractive, open-minded people. They might be 'losers', or they might just be web savvy singles who are making the internet work for them.

Plus, by dating online or meeting someone via social media, you cut out that awkward 'covering the basics' part of a first date. Thanks to the web, awful 'what hobbies do you have?' conversations are a thing of the past. Chances are, you're sat in front of your date precisely because of your shared interests.

Enjoy anonymity

We're guessing you're pretty nervous about dating, but trust us, you've got it good. Imagine you were in this position 15 years ago – before you could open your laptop and fish for potential lovers from a sea of millions.

Maybe you'd have been set up on a blind date and had to watch in horror as your suitor's face fell upon gazing at you for the first time. Maybe you'd have replied to one of those lonely hearts ads in the paper and had to ring your potential date on their parents' landline. Landline? What even is that?

These days we're much more lucky in love. We can don our invisibility cloaks and peruse a vast array of singles with absolute anonymity. If you like the look of something, you can give it a wee taste, if not, you can walk on by without offending anyone.

Beware certainty

But do approach online dating with caution, because the infinite choice that the internet offers needs to be handled with care.

A common platitude meted out by well-meaning friends in the face of our dating woes is 'when it happens, you'll know'.

But here's the thing, you're never going to know in any concrete sense that someone you're dating is 100% right for you.

Psychologist Barry Schwartz argues that when it comes to dating, too much choice can be a negative thing. 'The temptation to not choose is great in a world where there is a large number of options... People think they need to find the absolute 'best' romantic partner for them,' Schwartz continues, 'but I believe that making a commitment is an act of faith. If you wait until you're sure, you'll die alone.'

So desire the best, by all means, but seeing as 'the best' is an illusion, be prepared to fall for someone without being certain that there's not someone better out there.

Get active

Try ditching the old candle-lit dinner thing. Meeting face to face can be extremely nerve racking, and you end up fiddling with your cutlery or scrunching the table cloth between your fingers. Solve that problem by doing something hands-on that'll also spur conversation. Pick berries. Go to the zoo. Take a cooking class.

For inspiration, visit doingsomething.co.uk, a website which 'takes the awkward out of dating' by not only pairing you with prospective mates, but suggesting fun, alternative date ideas, like ping pong, boozy afternoon tea, and go-karting.

If your chosen activity ends up being boring as hell, never mind. If you and your date can laugh about it and have a good time anyway, you'll know you're onto a winner.

Remember your manners

All the classic etiquette rules apply here, like showering, showing up on time, and chewing with your mouth closed. But there's a whole load of other, postmodern manners which you need to take into consideration, too.

Don't tweet or write status updates about your date – you never know who is reading, and you could easily end up red-faced.

Journalist Tony Parsons said that having your mobile on the dinner table is as rude as having your penis on the dinner table. He may have a point. Unless you're expecting an urgent call, don't leave your phone out. It sends direct messages to your date: I'm leaving my options open tonight; there might be more entertaining things going on elsewhere; this conversation isn't stimulating enough to consume my full attention.

Don't admit on a first date that you've been snooping on someone's Facebook profile. Playing it cool is part of the fun of dating, and even though it's expected these days, no-one wants to hear that a complete stranger has been pouring over their photographs.

Be intuitive

Leave the 'your mum' jokes at the door for this one, and don't even think about bringing up your views on corporal punishment. Feel your way through the conversation and use your intuition to get an idea of what's acceptable fodder.

Don't talk at length about your ex. It tells your date, rather unsubtly, that your previous love is still on your mind.

Don't moan about work, unless your sparkling wit can turn your professional woes into side-splitting anecdotes. Complaining can be draining for the listener.

Don't give too many details. If you've got a technical job or hobby, don't bamboozle your date with jargon and impenetrable language. When you ask, 'Are you sure you wanna hear about it? It's pretty boring', and they say yes, they mean no.

Do talk about your hobbies in terms of how they make you feel; how you got into them; what excites you about them. Emotions are universal and relatable.

Enjoy the ride

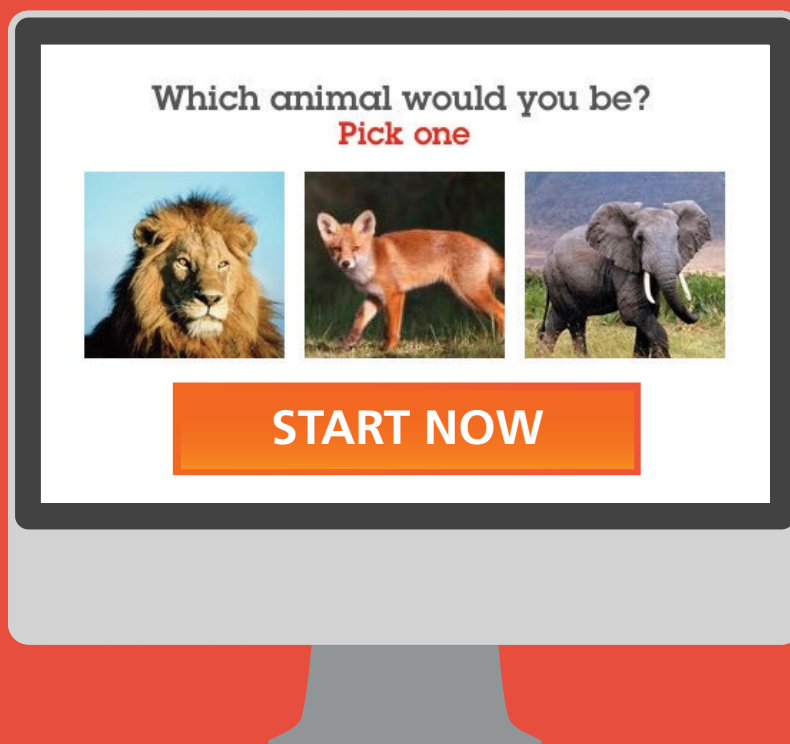
The ultimate aim of dating is finding a partner, right? Well, yeah, kinda. But that doesn't mean it's worthless if that doesn't happen.

People with a healthy attitude towards dating enjoy the chance to get out into the world, see new venues, try new things and meet new people (whether they're marriage material or not).

Continue your journey

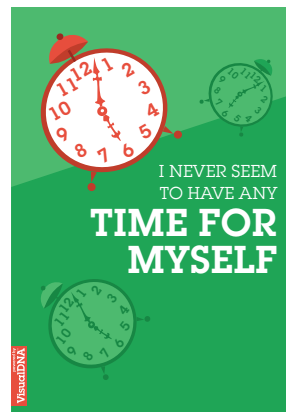
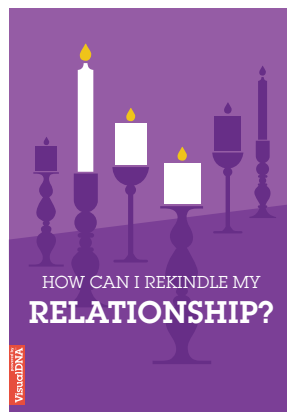
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