

## Conscious Dating® for Relationship Success

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Most singles are seeking a committed relationship and date with that goal in mind. Many are not ready for commitment for a variety of reasons, but they don't want to be alone, and so they date to find a partner anyway. When their dating strategy doesn't align with their readiness status, these singles unconsciously set themselves up for failure, complicating their lives and those of their dating partners.

Just because you want something doesn't necessarily mean you're ready for it. Many variables can interfere with your readiness for a committed relationship with someone you meet, such as being involved with someone else, going through a divorce, financial trouble, career demands, family obligations, physical health challenges, or mental/emotional health challenges such as addictions, depression, or anxiety disorders. It would be a tragedy to meet your soul mate and not be ready and then not be available. Getting involved in a relationship before you are ready can create a shaky foundation of unfinished business that eventually brings a relationship crashing down.

How do you know if you are ready for a committed relationship? Should you avoid dating if you are not ready for a committed relationship? If you do date, what should you do to align your dating strategy with your readiness status?

There are basically three forms of dating relationships: **short-term recreational**, **long-term committed**, and the **mini-marriage**. The purpose of recreational dating is to have fun and satisfy your social needs when you do not want, or are not ready for a committed relationship. This type of dating often occurs early in life or after a divorce or death of a spouse. The purpose of long-term committed dating is to find your lifetime partner. The mini-marriage is a hybrid combination.

### Short-Term Recreational Dating

Recreational dating is when singles meet and date for fun and socialization, without future expectations. This is kind of like working for a temporary agency in-between job and enjoying the variety and learning of short-term assignments before you decide your next career move. This is a useful form of dating for singles that, for one reason or another, are not ready for a committed relationship.

For recreational dating to work, both parties must be on the same page. Physical and emotional boundaries are needed that can be different for each individual, such as level of sexual involvement, whether to be exclusive or not, expected time commitment, whether to involve your “friend” with your children, and one partner wanting more involvement than the other wants or is ready for. Deciding upon and keeping these boundaries can be difficult for singles who, ready or not, would rather be in a relationship.

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Many failed relationships are the result of singles seeking to meet their immediate physical and emotional needs, and not learning the skills and exercising the self-discipline needed to date recreationally while becoming ready for a committed relationship. It can be very challenging to keep boundaries and be nonexclusive when your ultimate desire is to find your lifetime partner.

Recreational dating can function to help prepare you for a committed relationship. It can be a valuable learning laboratory for practicing relationship skills, gaining relationship experience, and increasing self-awareness of relationship needs.

The characteristics of short-term recreational dating include:

**Purpose:** fun, satisfy social needs

**Focus:** meeting short-term needs while working toward long-term goals beyond the relationship

**Screening Criteria:** compatibility for having fun

**Nonexclusive:** open to dating more than one person at a time

**Limited involvement:** keeping boundaries around sex, time, emotional investment, present and future expectations

**Typically consciously chosen:** this is not a serious relationship and it is clearly understood by both parties

### Long-Term Committed Dating

This form of dating is like interviewing potential employers to find just the right fit of company and job opportunity for your career. The paradox of Long-Term Committed Dating is that you must be a free agent, staying single and available to find the partner who is right for you and who meets your requirements, in addition to having chemistry.

The challenge of this form of dating is to keep attractive potential partners at an appropriate distance while you are in the process of scouting, sorting, screening, and testing. The characteristics of Long-Term Committed Dating include:

**Purpose:** to find lifetime partner

**Focus:** long-term, building desired future

**Screening Criteria:** must meet requirements

**Seeking exclusive relationship:** but staying non-exclusive until you have tested a potential partner who meets your relationship criteria

**Gradually decreasing boundaries:** increasing emotional investment

**Typically consciously chosen:** using a process and strategies that are clearly communicated to potential partners

### The Mini-Marriage

The mini-marriage results from acting committed and being exclusive before you are ready for a committed relationship, or doing so with someone whom you don't consider a likely long-term partner choice. This is the one-night stand that never left! People who are not ready for commitment (or who don't want commitment with their current partner), but are in exclusive relationships interfere with their ability to focus on building the life they really want, becoming ready for the relationship they really want, and attracting the partner they really want.

Mini-marriages are typically driven by need, fear; and unconsciousness:

- Need for companionship
- Fear of being alone
- Fear that you can't get what you really want
- Lack of awareness of your readiness status and of how to get your social and relationship needs met effectively

This is like accepting your first job offer, not wanting to pass it up because you need a job, ignoring the red flags, and crossing your fingers that it will work out.

Characteristics of a Mini-Marriage include:

**Purpose:** to meet physical, social, emotional needs prior to a committed relationship or when commitment is not desired; sometimes to “test drive” a relationship and see if it is a good long-term choice

**Focus:** meeting short-term needs, unclear about future of relationship

**Not Long-Term:** one or both partners are unsure about the relationship or don't consider it to be a good long-term choice

**Not Committed:** may appear committed but are not. One or both partners are not ready for a committed relationship

**Exclusive:** usually exclusive and appears committed to the observer

**Few Boundaries:** typically early (even immediate) emotional and physical involvement with few boundaries

**Typically unconscious:** partners are aware of but don't discuss the above

### Live your Vision and be a “Successful Single”

To successfully avoid the “mini-marriage” style of dating and mating you must decide if you are ready for a committed relationship or not. While it is understandable to want the benefits of a committed relationship (security, companionship, sex), to have a successful lifetime partnership it is important to be ready for commitment in all the areas of your life highlighted in your “Goals for Living My Vision”, and to be in a position of “choice” rather than “need”.

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If you are not ready for a committed relationship due to timing (e.g. recovering from divorce), health (physical/mental/emotional), finances, lifestyle, etc., it is best to date a variety of people on a non-exclusive basis and have fun, learning more about yourself and relationships in the process, while you are working to live your Vision, be a “successful single” and become ready for the life and relationship you really want.

### Short-term vs. Long-term Dating Relationships

When you are ready to find your lifetime partner, we suggest following the above guidelines and scout, sort, and screen potential partners until you find someone who is highly aligned with what you are seeking. This means staying available and not entering “mini-marriages.”

If you are not ready for a long-term committed relationship, but you do want to date and have fun, we suggest you focus on short-term recreational relationships. This kind of dating relationship is generally non-exclusive, and the purpose is to have fun. It is possible to be exclusive in a recreational relationship, but very risky as it is hard to keep the boundaries necessary to avoid the mini-marriage.

Some suggestions for keeping boundaries on short-term recreational relationships are:

- **Be honest.** Be very clear with your dates that you are not looking for or ready for a committed relationship. This can be a challenge and narrows the field, as many people get involved with the goal of being a couple, and are not as conscious of the problems of the “mini-marriage” style of dating and the need for boundaries as you are. It is best to be honest, and not deceptive about where you are coming from. While it might turn off some people who are seeking commitment, the ones that are aligned with you at this stage of your life will be much more fun, and less complicated in the long run.
- **Don't be exclusive.** This is the best way to avoid the mini-marriage and getting overly involved with someone who you know is not a long term partner choice, but it is often hard to put into practice. If you are going to be exclusive, it would be VERY important that the previous suggestion be followed and your dating partner be in a similar mindset/place in their life.
- **Set a time limit.** Don't be with any one person for more than –x- months (3, 4, 5, etc.), then break it off. Be honest from the beginning that it is short term.
- **Break it off when problems start.** The purpose of a recreational relationship is to have fun- working through relationship problems is what you do in a committed relationship. For a recreational relationship, having a problem is when the fun ends, and the relationship needs to end.

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Many people find any of the above hard to do, so they stick it out and the fun relationship turns into a long, drawn out committed relationship (mini-marriage) that shouldn't have happened in the first place; "the one-night stand that wouldn't leave" as people say. We suggest you commit to a strategy and promise to be supportable to your coach if you are having trouble following through with it. If you consider them all too hard, restricting, heartless, unrealistic, etc., then perhaps you should focus on finding your lifetime partner and your long-term goals, instead of distracting yourself with fun and putting your long-term goals at risk.

It is understandable to want the benefits of a committed relationship - regular sex, companionship, security, etc., but relationship failure is common because people focus on getting what they want in the short term and do not look at the long-term consequences.

If you are ever going to find your lifetime partner, you must make yourself available, and if you are involved with people that are not good long-term choices for you, you won't be available. The messiest relationships happen when people jump from one relationship to a "better" one that they think is a better long-term choice; these are usually doomed to failure.

However, if you are not ready for a committed relationship, recreational dating is good and appropriate. You can have fun and learn about yourself and relationships while you are transitioning to the place in your life when you will be ready. When the time comes that you have had enough fun and want something more permanent and meaningful, it is a sign of readiness, (provided the other pieces of your life are in place as well - mental, emotional, physical, financial, legal, career, etc.).

Many people attempt to convert a short-term recreational relationship into a long term committed one. This is possible, but all your requirements must be met. Too often these relationships do not work in the long term, because the criterion for choosing a recreational relationship and having it work (fun), is very different from the criterion for choosing a committed relationship that would work in the long run.

These ideas may be pretty new and radical to you, and different from the cultural norm that is around you. Our concern is that our current culture does not support singles to make good long-term relationship choices, as the high divorce rate and declining marriage rate attests. Our hope is that you will use these ideas and strategies and be successful in "finding the love of your life and the life that you love."