
The Smart Girl's Guide to Dating a Divorced (or Divorcing) Man

How to Decide if He's
Right for You

Melissa Josue
<http://www.HappyHealthyRelationship.com>



Hi, I'm Melissa Josue from DatingADivorcedManSupport.com and HappyHealthyRelationship.com. Thank you so much downloading my guide, *"The Smart Girl's Guide to Dating a Divorced (or Divorcing) Man: How to Decide If He's Right For You."*

Before I jump into the content, I want to note what this guide is and what it is not. This guide is *not* about telling you whether dating or being in a relationship with a divorced or divorcing man is right or wrong. I'm not here to judge women who are dating a divorced or divorcing man. And I'm not here to judge the divorced or divorcing man.

This guide is about **empowering you with the tools and techniques for making informed decisions** in your relationships.

This guide is about **empowering you to make your own choices, with greater clarity and confidence**, about which path feels right to you---which path feels true to you---for your life and your relationship.

This guide is about **raising awareness of your inner resources**, your power to choose, and the value of being deeply connected to your truth.

This is one of the biggest things that we struggle with in our relationships...**clarity, conflicting feelings, and not knowing what we "should" do next.**

It is truly my hope that you find this content valuable in helping to increase your clarity on whether the relationship you are in is right for you.

And what I mean by "right", is really about asking yourself the question(s): **"Am I ultimately going to be happy with him?" "Is this relationship going to be fulfilling for me in the long term?"**

I know those are *really big questions* when we are considering someone as a long-term partner, or possible life partner.

That is why I created this guide on HappyHealthyRelationship.com. Those, among other questions, were the hard questions that I grappled with before deciding to commit to the man that I'm married to today.

And I know the answers to those questions are not easy to come by, especially when you do not know where to begin.

In fact, nobody really teaches us how to consider and choose a partner for a long-term relationship.

No one really teaches us how to identify “the one”, your soulmate, or whether someone will make a wonderful life partner. We may set up expectations, and daydream about our future partner, but for the most part, many of us just let “chemistry” lead the way; we fall in love, and we navigate (or wing it) from there.

I think the only formal education in relationship skills that I have ever received, other than my coaching training, was in ninth grade, in a class called “Lifeskills”. And, the only thing that I really remember from that class was a teen mom from our school coming to talk to us about teenage pregnancy. The message from her was basically, “don't get pregnant in high school.” But, other than that, I do not recall ever getting any formal education, training, or coaching (meaning *being* coached myself) in relationships and relationship skills, until I was well into adulthood, had been dating for many years, and was already married.

In fact, I think it is really interesting how little time, attention, and resources we invest in setting ourselves up for relationship success and happiness. We instead invest a lot of the attention and resources on preparing for our *career* success. We invest a lot of this attention and these resources on preparing for our *business* success—chiefly, if you're an entrepreneur. We also

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spend a lot of attention and resources on making our *wedding day* amazing; if you have ever been married.

I wonder how different the world would be if more people were highly conscious and highly purposeful in their decisions about their relationships and with their relationship choices. How would the world be different if more men and women knew how to effectively choose relationships, how to “unchoose” relationships, how to navigate relationship challenges, and how to ultimately enjoy happy, healthy, fulfilling relationships.

I know my life changed when I started becoming more conscious about my relationships. And I invite you to think about this: **How would *your* life change?**

When I met my future husband, I had never been married myself and did not have children of my own. I had not yet hit my stride in my career, but I was an avid traveler with a lust for life! (I still am!)

I did not imagine that the love of my life would be a divorced dad of two, with an ex-wife who practically lives around the corner.

So when I found myself getting serious with a divorced man with kids – I honestly was not sure how to proceed. A lot of questions came up for me:

Am I ready for this kind of commitment?

What if it doesn't work out? How will that affect the kids?

Would he want more children if I decided I wanted to have children of my own one day?

How do I deal with his ex-wife, knowing that she is someone he had once loved, had children with, and knowing that she will forever be a part of his life?

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It took a lot of personal growth to find the answers to those difficult questions, and to overcome our relationship challenges.

Before eventually marrying a divorced dad, I spent *over* ten years dating. And *some* of those relationships were with men who were divorced, or in various stages of divorce. And when I tried to confide in friends or turn to self-help books, I was surprised at the lack of resources out there,

especially since (according to the National Center for Health Statistics) fifty-percent of marriages result in divorce... So there are a lot of divorcees out there who are potentially dating!

But as a single, never-married woman with no kids of my own... I did not know anything about caring for kids, or being "daddy's girlfriend", or how to navigate the family politics, and emotions with the ex-wife and extended family—especially while being the new girlfriend after a divorce.

It can all get very touchy.

And, I think this is where a lot of women run the other direction; if they have not already done so. I can certainly empathize.

Soon I was questioning whether it was all worth it; whether this was a relationship was something that I really wanted to commit to.

Even my own grandmother – God bless her – asked my boyfriend point-blank (because that is her style), “What if your ex-wife wants you back??”

Valid concern!

(He assured grandma that his ex was *certainly* over him and the likelihood of them getting back together was pretty nonexistent.)

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Still, I wasn't prepared for the pressure of family and friends chiming in—and they will chime in with their opinions. Or the uneasiness of seeing photos of my honey and his ex-wife together when visiting his mother's house, or the sting of hearing his kids cry out that they miss their mommy, when you are treating them to a fun-filled, kid-friendly, weekendlong vacation.

It can be tough, emotionally.

But what made *all* the difference between feeling bad or growing beyond it, were the conscious choices that I had made; the choices that I had made in my attitude and in my actions.

Yet, those choices didn't come easy.

It took a lot of digging within, asking myself the tough questions, and being *really honest* and clear about what I wanted in my life.

Those tough choices were made with **deep self-awareness**.

And my hope is that the information in this guide will inspire deeper self-awareness within you, too, and offer valuable tools and clarity into how to have the relationship that you truly want.

In this guide, I offer a lot of information and How-To's, so you might want to read this with a pen in hand to write down any points of inspiration, or take notes to help you remember.

So let us get started. On to key #1!

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Key #1 Clarify the status of your relationship.

Key #1 for how to decide if he is right for you, is to be clear on the *status* of the relationship. What this really means is being clear on the *facts* of your relationship. What are the facts about your

relationship? For example, is he divorced or separated? Those are simply facts of the relationship. What is your current commitment level? What is his commitment level? What stage are you in your relationship? Are you Dating? Are you an Exclusive Couple?

Status of the relationship also refers to the type and purpose of the relationship: are you dating just for fun, or are you dating with the intention of finding a life-partner? Neither is right or wrong; they are just different. Being clear on the status of the relationship means being clear on *why* you're in this relationship; why you are dating in the first place. Conversely, “dating for fun and recreation”, and “dating with the intention of finding a life-partner” are simply *types* of dating.

The status of the relationship also refers to the commitment level. Where on the continuum of commitment are you and your partner? Sometimes partners are in different places along the continuum. One person may feel more committed to the relationship than the other, which can cause a lot of conflict and confusion in the relationship.

Why It's Important

So why is being clear about the status of your relationship important? If you have ever been frustrated with the pace of a relationship—be it going "too fast" or "too slow"—it often points to a difference in the commitment level and readiness of each partner. For example, if you're considering taking your relationship to the next level of commitment, whether that means

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becoming an exclusive couple or becoming engaged, and you are wondering why he is not referring to you as his girlfriend, or why he hasn't proposed yet, then he may not be at the same level of commitment and readiness that you are.

Many relationship conflicts come from not being on the same page about the status of relationships, or the rate at which the relationship is advancing to greater levels of commitment. In conclusion, being clear on the status of the relationship, and being on the same page about the level of commitment that you both feel, will help you avoid conflicts and frustration about these issues.

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How to Be Clear on the Status of Your Relationship

Have a clear notion of what commitment is.

So *how* do you find out the status of your relationship?

Well, you need to have a clear notion of what commitment is. But when we ask different people what commitment means to them, they are going to give you different answers, because there are both different *gradations* of commitment and different *types* of commitment.

Most people might say that commitment is a promise to do something. However, people can promise to do something, but not follow through on that promise. So, that person may be committed in their attitude (they *say* they are going to do something), but then do not show commitment in their actions.

On the flip side, people can be committed in their actions, but not in their attitude. For example, if a wife is wondering whether her husband is right for her, she is committed in action (committed through marriage), but she still feels unsure about whether they should be together (so she is not yet committed in her attitude).

There are different types and levels of commitment. Sharing a lease, versus sharing a mortgage, are different levels of commitment. Being a girlfriend, versus being a fiancé, are different gradations of commitment.

So it's really important to be clear about what commitment is to you, and what level of commitment you are at in your relationship.

I really like David Steele's description of what commitment is. David Steele is the author and founder of the Relationship Coaching Institute, and *his* view of commitment makes a lot of sense to me. Essentially, he says that *true* commitment is committed action (and ongoing actions), combined with a committed attitude.

In other words, commitment is...

- explicit and unambiguous (there is a clear line)
- a formal event of some kind between two people (cohabiting, marriage, etc.)
- something you do over time (ongoing actions)
- often legally enforceable; has consequences for breaking it (co-signing a lease, sharing bank accounts, marriage, etc.)

You are not in a committed relationship if...

- your partner is not aware your relationship is committed (you are not on same page)
- you are wondering if this relationship is committed (there is a conflict in attitude versus fact)
- you and your partner have differences in opinion about the status of the relationship
- your friends and family have different perceptions about the status of the relationship (a commitment is unambiguous)
- you and your partner have not explicitly formalized your commitment in some way or formal act (taking the formal step of becoming committed, crossing the line)

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- relying on verbal promises without a significant track record (actions) of those promises being kept

Know what stage of relationship you are currently experiencing.

The next way to gain clarity on the status of your relationship, is to know what stage of the relationship you are in. It is important to make the distinctions between different types of dating and different types of commitment. The decision-making process for deciding whether you should stay or leave will be different, depending on the level of commitment or dating you are at, and the *impact* of staying or leaving will also be different.

For example: are you dating? Are you dating exclusively or non-exclusively? If you are dating, are you dating just for fun (recreational dating), or are you dating to find a long-term relationship or life-partner? (committed dating)

Or are you in the *pre-committed* stage of dating?

Pre-Committed

- In the pre-committed stage, you might or might not be dating exclusively.
- This is the stage where most people are asking, “Is this relationship right for me?”
- You are in the pre-committed stage; you are not yet married and not yet engaged.
- You may or may not be considering engagement.
- Pre-commitment is a form of commitment, but you have not yet made the kind of commitment where you have pledged to stay together for life, and you are still trying to figure out whether this relationship is a good long-term fit for you.

Or is your relationship in the pre-marital stage?

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Pre-Marital

- This usually means that you are engaged; you have both explicitly made the decision that you want to get married.
- You have not gotten married yet or taken the step to make your commitment legally binding

And then there's the committed stage of the relationship that is typically a marriage or legally binding commitment.

Committed

- Typically a marriage or other legally binding commitment
- Or if you do not have a legally binding commitment, you have had an event or taken some action to make your commitment explicit to each other—You have performed a ceremony in front of family and friends (or alone on a mountaintop in front of your God).

What Type or Stage Is Your Relationship In?

Be clear about the facts of the relationship.

The next part for how to be clear about the status of your relationship is to be clear on the facts of the relationship. For example, if you are dating a separated, divorcing, or divorced man, and trying to decide whether this relationship is right for you, or if you are engaged to a divorcee and are blending families, it will really help you know what is involved with dating a divorced or divorcing man.

It can be an emotionally intense and complicated relationship and often this is where many women really burn out because they are unclear and get blind sighted with what's really involved with dating a divorced or divorcing man.

So be sure to take a look at the differences between separated, divorcing, and divorced.

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A quick overview:

If he is *separated*, he may or may not have filed divorce papers. He may be separated in attitude, but still living at home with his wife.

If he is *divorcing*, the papers have been filed.

If he's *divorced*, the divorced has been finalized, and a judge has ordered the dissolution of the marriage.

But other things to think about would be whether he has kids, and what kind of custody agreement he has. Your relationship will be vastly different depending on if he has full-time custody, or if his kids live in another country and he only sees them twice a year.

So really get to know the lay of the land and the facts of the situation.

Unfortunately (or fortunately...depending on how you look at it), there is no simple mathematical equation, or test, or quiz that can predict whether or not your relationship will be a lasting success.

Our life is an *experience*—not a foregone conclusion (and that's a good thing!).

But the more aware you are of what, potentially, you're getting into when you enter a relationship, the better you can mitigate your chances of heartbreak and relationship disaster.

And with that awareness you make yourself more available for long-term love with the right guy.

Raising your awareness means being clear on the facts of your relationship.

In other words, what exactly is a separated man or divorced man? What are they going through, and what should you be concerned about if you're in a relationship with a man who might be in a given stage of divorce or separation?

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Here are some of the basics to help you get clearer on his situation... And ultimately help you get clearer insight on whether or not this is a relationship where you want to go into deeper levels of commitment.

The questions that follow each section are questions to consider when you're thinking about whether to continue seeing him—especially if you have the intention of dating with the purpose of finding a life-partner.

These questions might not be as important to you if you're just dating recreationally and short term.

But if you're trying to date with the intention of finding a life-partner, and are looking for a long-term relationship, the questions below will help you see his situation more clearly, manage your expectations, and decide whether you want to stay in the relationship or leave.

The Separated Man

A separated man is one who is still legally married. He might be in the process of divorce, or the divorce papers might not have been filed at all.

Nolo.com, which is an online resource for legal information in the United States, explains the different types of separation this way:

Trial separation. When a couple lives apart for a test period, to decide whether or not to separate permanently, it's called a trial separation. Even if the spouses don't get back together, the assets they accumulate and debts they incur during the trial period are usually considered marital property. This type of separation is usually not legally recognized, but is instead a specific period in a couple's relationship.

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Living apart. Spouses who no longer reside in the same dwelling are said to be living apart. In some states, living apart without intending to reunite changes the spouses' property rights. For example, some states consider property accumulated and debts incurred while living apart to be the separate property or debt of the person who accumulated or incurred it. In other states, property is joint, unless and until a divorce complaint is filed in court. Also in some states, couples must live apart for a certain period of time before they are permitted to file for a no-fault divorce.

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Permanent separation. When a couple decides to permanently split up, it's often called a permanent separation. It may follow a trial separation, or may begin immediately when the couple starts living apart. In most states, all assets received and most debts incurred after permanent separation are the separate property or responsibility of the spouse incurring them. However, debts that happen after separation and before divorce are usually joint debts if they are incurred for certain necessities, such as to provide for the children or to maintain the marital home.

Again, a couple's decision to permanently separate may not be considered a legal one unless one party files for legal separation instead of divorce.

Legal separation. A legal separation results when the parties separate and a court rules on the division of property, alimony, child support, custody, and visitation — but does not grant a divorce. This isn't very common, but there are situations where spouses don't want to divorce for religious, financial, or personal reasons, but do want the certainty of a court order that says they're separated and addresses all the same issues that would be decided in a divorce. The money awarded for support of the spouse and children under these circumstances is often called "separate maintenance" (as opposed to "alimony" or "child support").

If you want to go deeper into understanding the separation and divorce process, [*Nolo's Essential Guide to Divorce \(2014\)*](#) is a great resource that guides you through all stages of separation and divorce.

If you're in a relationship with a separated man, and are thinking about whether you should continue to see each other, it's better to *get clear on what's happening in his life right now and how that might affect your relationship*. This will help you decide whether or not you'll be truly happy being with him at the present time.

When you get clear what you want in a happy, fulfilling relationship, and then figure out what requirements you have that comprise a happy, fulfilling relationship for you, that deep knowledge of your wants, needs and requirements will make it easier for you to determine whether or not this relationship is a good long-term fit for you. (I go deeper into this later in this guide)

In general, separation in the case where the still married couple is living apart (and not yet legally separated), is a very volatile time.

They might either be considering divorce, or maybe they haven't even decided yet on whether to pursue divorce.

So if you are getting into a relationship with a separated man, with the intention of considering him as a long-term partner or a life-partner, it's like trying to build a house on *really* shaky ground.

While he might *want* and fully intend to get divorced, his separated status might limit his availability to have normal relationship interactions with you... This could be in the form of situations that include having you meet his friends and family or having you spend time with him on a regular, predictable basis.

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And the question isn't when he's going to get a divorce, but whether you'll be happy in a relationship with him as you're experiencing it *right now*.

Important questions to consider when dating a separated man:

- How long has he been separated?
- Do he and his wife still live together?
- Are he and his wife working towards reconciliation?
- How do they split parenting duties if they have children?
- Do you they have plans to divorce?
- Have they each agreed to see other people?

There are couples who make things work after meeting, while one is in the middle of a separation. In many cases, however, even if a man is ready to be separated, this can be a period of huge change and turmoil for him.

He may not yet know what he wants next, or how fully prepared he is to commit to someone new.

When you find out the answers to those questions, be honest with yourself about the kind of relationship that you really want to have, and whether his current situation is aligned with that vision.

The Divorcing Man

Once papers have been filed, a couple moves from separated to divorcing.

In this case, the decision has been made to officially end the marriage and stop working towards reconciliation.

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Understanding the circumstances surrounding his divorce can be helpful in determining whether or not this is a relationship you want to pursue.

The thing is to try and be as honest as possible about his intentions, and pay attention to your *experience* with him to help you decide whether you want to keep seeing him.

As with men who are separated (or any man who is out there on the “dating market”), men who are in the middle of a divorce might not always be looking to go into another relationship right away. He might just want to date for a fun for a while—or he might be *unsure* of what he wants.

And there may be some cases where a relationship was over years before the divorce paperwork was actually filed, in which case the man you are dating could have long since moved on and may be more than ready to fall in love again now.

Treading carefully until you fully understand the situation is always the best way to protect your own heart.

Important questions to consider when dating a divorcing man:

Since he’s divorcing, he’s also separated. Here are some additional questions to consider next to the questions to think about when dating a separated man.

- Why did he and his wife decide to proceed with a divorce?
- Who initiated the divorce proceedings?
- How does he feel about the divorce proceedings and how are they handling it (mediation, family court, etc)?
- How does his wife feel about what's going on?
- How would he characterize the divorce proceedings (bitter, not bitter, very difficult, relatively painless, etc)?

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- Is there a possibility that he and his wife might try to reconcile their marriage at some point?
- If they have kids, how do they divide parenting duties?

You may also want to pay attention to how his friends and family react to you, if he's introduced you to them; their reactions may give you an indication of how ready they believe him to be.

Try to remember that the actual act of going through a divorce can be quite trying, no matter how prepared a man may be for this part of his life to be over.

If kids are involved, there can be a lot of emotions from them, and from all parties, about the dissolution of the marriage and the family unit as they know it.

Because he is dealing with the divorce proceedings and any emotional upset from his ex, kids or friends and family, he might not be as available—both physically and emotionally—as you'd like him to be for normal dating activities such as date nights, weekends away, or meeting your friends and family.

Again, think about what you really want in a fulfilling relationship, and whether dating him while he's going through a divorce will offer you that desired experience.

The Divorced Man

When a divorce is final, a judge has ordered the dissolution of the marriage.

Child custody and division of property, as well as child support, alimony, who gets the dog and the Christmas china, etcetera, are all part of that settlement.

The list can go on.

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They say that divorce is like the end of a civilization.

And depending on how long they've been married and whether they have kids, it could be a large or small civilization.

Think about how much stuff you as a single person accumulate in eight years, which is the average length of a marriage that ends in divorce in the United States.

From the money in your bank account (or the debt you've accumulated), to the stuff in your living space, and the relationships you've built with friends and family, eight years can be a lot of stuff and a lot of history.

In a marriage, all of that “baggage” is community property.

And in a divorce, all of that “baggage” and their whole civilization is affected in some way, by the dissolution of the marriage.

But now that the divorce is said and done, how does his past affect your current relationship with him?

Important questions to consider when dating a divorced man:

- How long has it been since their divorce?
- What were the reasons for his divorce?
- How often do he and his ex communicate with each other now?
- How do he and his ex split parenting duties? (Assuming kids are involved)
- How does he view marriage now?
- Does he see himself getting married again in the future?
- Are there things he would do differently in his relationship if he got married again?

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How to Go about Finding the Answers to These Questions

The best way is simply ask him.

Your first date with him might not be the best time to ask him those questions.

But who knows—you might have built up a kind of rapport with each other, perhaps through communicating online (if you met online), where you *do* feel comfortable asking those questions very early in the relationship.

The thing is, the sooner you know the answers to those questions, the sooner you'll be able to discern whether he's a good match for you, and whether you want to continue seeing each other.

And it's not a bad thing to show him that you're curious about him and his past.

He might even appreciate that you're interested.

It's normal to want to know where our potential partner is coming from, and what he's going through right now. How else are we supposed to get to know someone, other than to experience them and ask relevant questions?

The bottom line is, the more aware you are of what you are potentially getting into, the better you can mitigate the chances of relationship disaster and heartbreak. And in turn, you make yourself more available for long-term love with the right guy.

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Key #2 Tune in to your lived experiences.

Tuning in to your *lived experience* in your relationship means taking a close look at what your present experience is of this person you are dating. It is not the experience that you *hope* to have with this person, but your present, *lived* experience.

This means thinking about your experience of this person today, in the present. What challenges are you experiencing right now? What is going really well? What is working? What is *not* working?

And it is important to look at your *current*, true, present experience of this person. Sometimes, when we really like someone, despite the things that drive us crazy, we have a tendency to talk ourselves *into* a relationship by ignoring our true experience of the relationship. We only focus on the person's potential, or what we *hope* will change.

The problem with focusing on a person's potential is that "potential" is not real data; it's not tangible information. Potential is not real—It is what we forecast. It is a *prediction*. *Everyone* has potential. *Anything* can happen in the future. People can change, or they can not change.

So if you are trying to figure out whether this relationship is a good fit for you, long term, you have to look at your *current* experience. Otherwise, you would essentially be basing the important decision, of whether or not to be with this person, on a prediction; on experience that has not happened yet.

Here is the thing: when we fall in love with someone's potential and become *attached* to their potential, we are not falling in love with the real person. We are *not* falling in love with who they

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are today, we are falling in love with *who we want them to be*. And the truth is that person who we want them to be might never show.

So, tuning in to your lived experience in this relationship means being really conscious about who your partner is *today*.

And it takes time to experience someone—that is why we date, right? We are trying to get to know someone. I think it is important not to rush the stages of dating and pre-commitment. This is a really valuable stage for figuring out whether or not he is right for you. Through your experience of him, you can figure out if he is a good match for you.

And by being really conscious of your experience, you can make decisions based on that experience and potentially save yourself a lot of pain and heartache. How painful would it be to discover that you do not really like this person when you are three kids and a mortgage into your relationship?

What You Need in Order to Tune into Your Experience

We need intention.

What is your intention for this experience? Are you looking for a life-partner, or are you looking to date just for fun? the problem is, a lot people do not set intentions when going into relationships. So we go into a relationship, pretty unclear of what is happening. Sometimes we just go into a relationship because we are really attracted to someone, but we do not have a clear vision for what we want. So, it is important set our intentions.

We need skills for screening.

The second thing we need to do, is to have the skills for effectively learning about and screening your partner or potential partners. The problem is, no one has really taught us how to do this. We

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learn about relationships through the relationships that are modeled to us early in life. I do not remember anyone in my life who formally taught me how to look for and screen a potential partner. We often go into relationships very blindly.

So, one way to really get to know and experience your partner, or the man you're dating, is to very intentionally ask questions and gauge their reaction.

For example, if you do not have kids of your own, and know you want to be a mom some day, yet you are unsure whether or not the man you are dating wants kids (or wants *more* kids), you might talk about how much you love kids, or how you cannot wait to spend time with your sister's kids this weekend. Then see how he responds.

Depending on where you are in your dating relationship, if you feel comfortable asking about whether he wants more kids, why not ask? If you want to be a mom someday, and that question scares him away, it is better to know sooner, rather than later.

So, really take note of your experience of this person. Who is he being in his work, with his family and friends, and with you? Is he walking his talk? And do you like him for who he is *today* or for who you hope he will become?

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Key #3 Get deeply connected to your truth—what truly matters to you.

The third key to finding relationship clarity, and deciding if he is right for you, is to get deeply connected to your truth—or in other words: know what truly matters to you. Becoming clear on what truly matters to you, and knowing what you truly want in your life and in a relationship is really important, because conflict and frustration in our relationships usually mean that we have needs and/or requirements that are going unmet.

For instance, if you are frustrated that he keeps flaking out on your date night plans because he is working late, or if he is a divorced dad, maybe his ex has to work late, and as a result, he has to take the kids for the night. Take a close look at why that may frustrate you. What about that situation bothers you? What need or want is going unmet?

Whether we are conscious of them or not, we all have non-negotiable requirements that *must* be met in order for a relationship to work. If *one* of your requirements is missing, the relationship will not work for you.

Being clear on what truly matters to you, means getting clear on your relationship requirements. This is really key to helping you decide whether this relationship will be fulfilling for you, long-term. For example, if your partner is cheating on you, and you have a relationship requirement about fidelity and trust, it will probably be very difficult for you to be happy in the relationship if your requirements for fidelity and trust are not met. When you become clear on your needs, wants, and requirements, you can compare those to the experience of your partner.

Requirements are the dealbreakers; they are the non-negotiables. We often confuse them, however, with needs and wants, and treat them as equal things. I want to make an important

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distinction between requirements and needs. As an example, a couple might argue about whether or not to have children (which is probably a requirement for at least one partner), and they might also argue about who forgot to pay the gas bill (a functional need). Both issues are pretty stressful and both issues interfere with the relationship working. But the *difference* is that how to pay the bills is negotiable, and there are many ways to work that out (pay now, pay later, work out a payment plan, one person pays the bills this month, the other person pays next month, etc.), whereas having children or not having children is pretty non-negotiable for most people. You either have children or you do not; there is no middle ground there. There is really no compromise on that issue. There you have the difference between requirements and needs. Requirements are dealbreakers. Needs are negotiable.

Wants are the icing on the cake. They are the gravy. They are nice to have, but they are not necessary for you to have, in order for the relationship to work.

Values and Vision

The other part of becoming clear about what you really want, is becoming clear on your purpose in life. Realizing your personal values, and the vision you have for your life, is also crucial in deciding whether or not you will be happy being with your partner long-term.

If you dream of being a mom, though your partner is a single dad, and is *done* with having kids, you are going to have to take a look at what choices you have for fulfilling that dream of being a mom.

We often ask ourselves, “Is this relationship right for me?” We are really asking ourselves, “Am I going to be happy in this relationship?” And that is a question that really depends on **what makes you happy** and **what truly fulfills you** at a deep level.

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Why Knowing What Matters to You Is Important

Gaining clarity on what matters to you is important because it helps you screen potential partners.

Knowing what you want helps you to more successfully evaluate your experience of a relationship and screen potential partners. You do not waste time dating someone whom you know is not going to work out (when they do not meet your requirements or do not share your values); you can say *no* to the relationship sooner rather than later. In order to get what we really want, we have to say no to what we do not want.

Becoming clear on what you really want, and what really matters to you, also helps you more effectively deal with baggage: both *your* baggage and *his* baggage. The truth is, we *all* have baggage. We are all products of our past experiences. The important thing is not what happened to us, but how we have moved forward from those experiences. Our past relationship experiences provide very important clues to what is truly important to us.

When we look back at why a relationship worked or did not work, even if they were not romantic relationships, but simply friendships or professional relationships, looking back in retrospect can tell you a lot about what you require and value in a relationship.

Because when you are conscious of what pushes your buttons, you are more prepared to respond to it when it happens, rather than react in way that stresses you out.

How Can We Be Clear on What We Want?

Awareness of What's Attractive to Us

So how do we become clear on what we want? We need a deeper awareness of what we are really attracted to in a relationship, and the skills to be *objective*. Many of us too often rely

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on chemistry to guide our relationship choices, rather than consciously choosing what we want. Chemistry, hormones, and initial attraction, are a real thing and they do have a purpose. They turn our heads and get us talking to each other in the hopes of propagating the human species.

The problem is, when we rely on chemistry alone, we can get ourselves into a romantic drama. In other words, we get ourselves into a relationship that is great for television, but emotionally *unsustainable*. Maybe you have experienced it before: there is an intense attraction, maybe incredible sex, but you feel like you are on an emotional rollercoaster. The relationship is pleasing you in *one* way, but your *other* important needs and requirements are going unmet.

The important thing is to have a balance between our heart and our head (or our hormones and our head), and be highly conscious about our relationships. It is hard to do when love songs, movies, and television shows are all about celebrating and promoting that *very* emotional drama. It is no wonder that many of us grow up thinking that that is what love and romance is supposed to be. In fact, some of us might think that if there *isn't* drama or intense emotions, then there must be something wrong with the relationship.

The thing is that infatuation wears off, relationships evolve, and you are left with the truth of who *you* are and who *your partner* really is—Which can be beautiful thing. Or it can be a nightmare, if it was chiefly about the chemistry to begin with.

Introspection

The second thing needed to gain clarity on what you want, is to make time and have a method to do that introspection. We need to take time to think through our needs, wants, and requirements, as well as our purpose, values, and vision. You might not know what you want yet because you simply have not thought it through.

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So having a method to discover your needs, wants, and requirements, as well as your purpose, values, and vision will help you gain much more clarity. Because when we do not know what we want, we *cannot* let our vision guide us (our hormones or fears end up guiding us instead), and that can take us way *off* track to the path to finding and having a fulfilling relationship.

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Key #4 Assess your compatibility.

The fourth Key to Relationship Clarity and for deciding if he is right for you, is assess your compatibility. Assessing your compatibility means taking a look how *aligned* you are in your important life and relationship areas. These areas include lifestyle, community, emotional needs, spirituality, domestic area/life, sexuality, passion, and personal development.

How aligned you and your partner are, and whether your relationship is going to work out, ultimately depends on what *matters* to you.

For example, I'm a fitness buff, but my husband does not exercise at all, other than walking to and from work! And I have tried to get him to go to the track with me, or go to the gym with me, but that never lasts long. So, that is a big difference in our lifestyles. We are incompatible in that area, but that area of our relationship works because it does not matter much to me that he is not a fitness buff. I have realized that I can live with that.

In the other hand, if you are a vegan, for example, and you hate the fact that your partner eats meat, and it goes against all your personal values and really bothers you, then you and your partner are obviously not aligned in that lifestyle area. But, the difference that and my exercise conflict is, if it really bothers you, it could be that you have a *need* or *requirement* in that area of your lifestyle that is not being met. Maybe you have a requirement that your partner has a lifestyle that is free of animal products.

Compatibility is very much about information and choice. And when you assess compatibility, you are really looking at your experience of this person with your needs and requirements in mind. You are looking at key areas of your life that are important you, such as your lifestyle, community, emotional needs, spirituality, domestic life, sexuality, passion,, and

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personal development. Knowing how compatible you are with your partner will help you make a conscious decision about whether or not he is right for you.

You offer yourself the best chance of relationship success and happiness, when you are both aligned in your vision, your life purpose, your requirements, needs, and wants. It does not mean they have to match up *exactly*; it just means they have to be *compatible*—That neither of your relationship requirements are going unmet, and both partners' needs are being met in one way or another.

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So How Do We Assess Compatibility?

Gather Information

Assessing compatibility is about getting enough information to determine if there is enough interest and alignment for you to choose to spend more time with him and go into deeper levels of commitment.

First, get clear on what's important to you: your values, and your relationship needs and requirements. Then pay attention to your lived experience and gather the information that you need in order to find out if he is aligned with your values, vision, needs and requirements. What is the information that you need?

Compatibility is assessed through information. And information is gained through experience and asking questions.

So think about: what questions could you ask to get the information that you need? (Keep in mind, he might not be forthcoming with the answers, and *that* in itself is information for you) What would you need to *see* or *experience* in your relationship in order to know whether he can

honor your needs and requirements and whether he and this relationship are aligned with your vision and values?

Be Objective

In order to assess compatibility, we need to be objective, because we cannot accurately assess compatibility if we are looking through rose-colored glasses. Being objective, means being a juror in your relationship. It may sound unromantic, I know, but what this really means as I mentioned before, is balancing our heads and our hearts.

We often do not give deep consideration to our compatibility with the person we are dating, because we have let chemistry and our deep attraction to this person, take total control of our relationship choices.

And so we end up *not* taking an objective look at our *true experience* with this person, and so we make choices based on our heart, instead of balancing our head and our heart.

Consider All Possibilities

In order to assess compatibility, we *also* need to be **willing to consider and face all possibilities**, including the possibility that you and he might *not* be compatible. Being objective is *difficult*. It is as fun as buying life insurance and realizing the fact that we are all going to die one day; we just never know when it will happen.

Being objective is difficult because we do not want to look at our lover while considering the possibility that it may not work out. We want to hope for the best. We want to keep trying. We want to "make it work"! And sometimes we get *stuck* in trying to make it work. So, when assessing compatibility, it is important to consider *all* possibilities.

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Know What to Look For

The third thing you need for assessing compatibility is that you need to **know *what to look for in the relationship***. The problem is, we often do not know what to look for in the relationship. Maybe we have not clearly established our needs and requirements, which makes determining whether he meets your needs and requirements more difficult. Knowing your needs and requirements will help you to gain clarity on what to look for, when you are looking at whether you're compatible. It will also help you to determine what would be a red flag for you, so you can decide what to do next in the relationship.

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Key #5

Consciously consider your choices.

Key #5 for relationship clarity is to consciously consider your choices.

Consciously considering your choices means taking a closer look at the impact of staying or leaving the relationship, being **clear about the choices in front of you**, and really being *thoughtful* when considering those choices. We always have choices, even when we do not think we do. For example: Not making a choice is still a choice.

This key is actually where a lot of people get stuck. We agonize over our choices or our *perceived* lack of choices.

Often, we already know how we want to move forward, we know in our hearts what is right for us, whether that means going deeper into commitment with your partner or saying goodbye. But we are often afraid to move forward; we do not want to take the leap. Or we move forward with a *whole lot* of pain and fear because we are not conscious in our decision-making.

Determining and considering your choices is really important because it helps you to be more prepared for the impact that your decision will have on your life. And consciously determining and considering your choices will also help you down from the fence, and to more confidently make a decision.

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How to Consciously Consider Your Choices

Approach It as a Skill and a Practice

It is helpful to approach decision-making and considering your choices as a **skill and a practice**. I say that because we are so used to *reacting* in our relationships. But, when we look at decision-making as a skill and a practice—a skill and a practice that heavily impacts our life—we are less reactive and we can more clearly see the choices in front of us. We are less likely to respond out of stress or fear, so we can then respond from a place of depth and truth.

Secondly, in order to explore your choices effectively, you need a way to process your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. You can do this a number of ways: you can talk to a trusted friend, because talking through our feelings and experiences really helps us process, or you can also write about it—you can journal.

Journaling is my recommended way of processing and helping clients become clear on their choices, because through the process of journaling you can really see, *there* on the page, what your current experience is.

Journaling is more than a diary, it is a tool for navigating life. It is a place for you to purge, to release, and a launchpad to help you move forward.

The magic of writing is that it allows you to put your thoughts on paper, or on a screen if you are typing, and then it allows you to look at your thoughts from a distance. And in that space, you can really see yourself, your life, and your relationship in an *expanded* way.

You can *notice* your thought patterns and write your way to discovering possibilities. Also, by unloading your thoughts on a page, you effectively make room for other thoughts and

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considerations. So you can really use journaling, which is a time-tested method, to *help* you make decisions *consciously*.

By journaling, you can take a look at the questions: “What are the best options, considering my experience in this relationship?” “What are the positive and negative aspects of staying?” “What are the positive and negative aspects of leaving?”

Journaling allows you a space where you are safe to be *completely* honest about what is on your mind. You have the opportunity to be honest about how you *feel* in your relationship and your experience of your relationship. And getting to that truth is extremely valuable.

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Key #6

Recognize your beliefs.

Key number six is to recognize your *beliefs*. This means becoming aware of your perspective about love, happiness, and relationships, and being aware of how these beliefs impact your life and relationships.

Often, we feel stuck because we simply do not know what other possibilities are available to us. Sometimes we don't know what other choices we have, so we stay where we are.

Looking at our beliefs about love and happiness means taking a look at our “shoulds”.

Whenever we say “should” or “should not”, it usually points to a belief we have about something. What do we think love and happiness “*should*” look like? How do we think love “*should*” be demonstrated?

It is important to look at what beliefs we carry, because our beliefs color our whole experience of our relationships. And as a result, our beliefs and perspectives also influence our actions.

So, for example, if you are considering leaving an unhappy relationship, but are finding it really difficult to move forward, take a look at what thoughts are bubbling to the surface. What concerns are coming up? What *fears* are coming up? It's important to become *conscious* of what beliefs and fears we are carrying, so that we can move through the fear and take the action that will lead to the relationship that we truly want.

When we are not conscious of our beliefs; we let fear guide our choices instead of *consciously* making our own choices with our ultimate vision in mind. It is painful to break up, even when we know the other person is not who we really want. Oftentimes, we simply avoid breaking up

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with our significant others. We try and make the relationship work, we compromise, and we settle for a relationship that, ultimately, makes us less than happy.

The main reason we fall into this kind of "relationship inertia" is fear. As an example, if you are thinking, consciously or unconsciously, that "there are no great guys out there, so I need to hang on to what I can get," you might have believe in scarcity, and live your life as if there were "only so many fish in the sea", so you have to "take what you can get."

Or, we may be afraid to be alone. We may be secretly afraid that no one else will want us or love us. Or, we are afraid that we will not find anyone else to be with us. So, we settle for the "best that we can find right now," or the best that we can *think* we can get.

But here is the thing: when we *settle* for less than what we really want, we *get* less than what we really want. As a result, we are not as happy as we could be if we had gone for what we really wanted. Also, that twenty-percent of the relationship that does not really work for you is *always* going to be there.

Maybe you have unconscious beliefs about love and relationships that are making it really difficult for you to let go of a relationship that is not working. If you find yourself on an emotional rollercoaster, and are giving your partner multiple second chances, take a closer look at what feelings and thoughts are coming up for you. What prompts you to offer him multiple chances. What fears are coming up? What beliefs do those fears point to?

How to Notice Your Beliefs

So *how* do you recognize your beliefs? In order to start uncovering those beliefs, you need a process to bring those beliefs into your conscious mind.

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Often, the people you spend the most time with, or the people who have had a big impact in your upbringing, will also carry the same beliefs. And so, when everyone around you carries the same beliefs, you do not have the opportunity to consider other perspectives, or how the perspective you are carrying may be impacting you.

We need a way to remove our beliefs from our thoughts, and consciously take a look at them.

Some people do this through mindfulness meditation. The best way that I have experienced is journaling. As I mentioned earlier, in journaling you are literally taking your thoughts, your stream of consciousness, and pouring them onto a page, where you have the opportunity to step back and really notice what is coming up for you. You have the opportunity to notice patterns and to then notice where you might be stuck.

Beliefs are so ingrained. We carry them for years. So often, we are totally unconscious about the beliefs we might be carrying and acting upon. I encourage you to start journaling to notice them.

Once you have awareness of your beliefs, you are better equipped to shift your actions and shift your perspective when thoughts with the word “should” come up in your mind. This awareness opens us up to more possibilities for our lives and relationships.

But, sometimes when that new door opens in your relationship choices, when the possibilities to step into deeper levels of commitment or to step away from a relationship come up, we often hesitate to take action on behalf that new awareness.

And this is another place where a lot of people get stuck. We often know in our hearts what change would benefit us, but shifting to a new way of living can be really difficult because it is new territory, and we do not have proof that taking this new action will work for us. In other words, we do not feel safe carrying out the new action.

The truth is, we cannot really make the fear go away. The fear will always be triggered by new actions where the outcomes are unknown. The fear is a result of our ego, the ancient part of our

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sense of self, trying to keep us safe. So *any* change is potentially dangerous, according to our ego. But our ego does not know the difference between positive change and negative change. All change is scary and threatening, according to our ego. But we can override that fear by taking steps toward and *through* our fear.

For example, if you have been feeling taken for granted, and have been wanting to set clearer boundaries around your time, attention, and emotions, it may be really difficult to do that, since you might be used to giving in all the time. But, taking incremental action, saying no to smaller things will help you build your confidence in saying no to the bigger things.

I know that sticking to your guns can be really hard, so if you are having difficulty, get the support of a trusted friend, family member, counselor, or coach to support you in taking the action that you really need to take.

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Key #7 Be the chooser.

Key #7 is to own your experience and be the chooser. Owning your experience means, to quote the author, David Steele, again, “*being the chooser* in your life and relationships.”

It means taking true *ownership*; really stepping into your role as the powerful creator of your experience, and honoring who *you* really are and what *you* really want. It also means letting others own *their* experiences, too. Letting your partner be who *they* are, be where they are at, and not feeling responsible *for* them.

It is really important for us to own our experiences and be the choosers in our relationships. Being the chooser, versus being reactive in our relationships, frees us to grow into more of who we truly want to be, and to grow into the life that we truly want to have.

It is incredibly empowering to know that we have that choice; that you are in a relationship because you decided to be in it, and that you can stay in your relationship by choice, or you can instead *choose to leave* the relationship.

I think this is what is missing in a lot of stories and pictures, out there in our mass media, about love and relationships. It is romantic in our society to find someone to complete us; to be our soul mate; to be “the one”. But the truth is, we are already complete.

The key to a fulfilling relationship is to find someone with whom you can always be who *you* are, and he can be who *he* is, and you can grow *together*.

So how do we own our experience and be the chooser in our lives and relationships?

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How to Be the Chooser in Your Life and Relationships

Let Him Be the Chooser in His Own Life

One way is that we need to let go of trying to fix our partner, and let him be the chooser in *his* own life, just as we act as the choosers in ours.

This is another area where a lot of people get stuck.

We are in love and we want it to work, so we keep trying to teach him, show him, or *punish* him into becoming the man that we want him to be.

If you find yourself giving your partner multiple second chances—if you find that you and your partner are on again, off again, on again, off again—take a look at whether you might have an attachment to who you *want* him to be, rather than who he is today. Are you letting him own his experience and be the chooser in his own life? Or are you trying to make him do or be something different?

This doesn't mean you have to stay *together* while he is being who he really is. If who he is choosing to be is not aligned with who *you* want to be, or is not compatible with you, it might be very difficult to have a harmonious relationship. And it may mean that you have to either let go of the issue, so that it is no longer an issue for you. Or you may have to choose to leave the relationship with him, in order for you to have the life and relationship that you really want.

Be Conscious in Your Relationship

The second thing you need to do, in order to be the chooser in your life and relationships, is to be as conscious as possible about your relationship, something I mentioned in earlier sections of this guide. This is because that awareness will help you make choices that are most aligned with what you truly want. The problem is, though, that many people feel like they do not have the tools and support to really feel empowered in their relationships, and to feel empowered to make the choices that they want to make. It is much *easier* to look to our partners and make them

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responsible for our unhappiness. After all, you would not have these challenges if your significant other was not in your life, right? Well, the truth is that happiness and fulfillment are really an inside job, and there is enormous empowerment that comes from owning our experiences, being the choosers in our lives, and in having the tools and skills to have the happy, healthy, and deeply fulfilling relationship that we want.

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Your Path to a Fulfilling Relationship

So let us go back in time for a moment; back to when you were a little girl. Perhaps you were playing pretend or dress up in a little white dress, dreaming about the day you marry your life-partner.

What are the pieces of that daydream that you remember the most? What stands out to you, even today, about the man you used to dream about marrying, traveling with, and stay with forever, growing old?

My guess is that, if you are really honest with yourself, you will find that that little girl did not go *too* deeply into the specifics of who that man was—Whether he would be separated or divorced, whether he would have kids from a previous marriage, or what his past looked like.

She just wanted to feel safe. She just wanted to be happy. She just wanted to be loved.



I know that being clear about whether this relationship is right for you can be very difficult, and that it sometimes brings up very difficult choices. I have grappled with those tough choices myself. If you are having trouble making a choice in your relationship, I encourage you to discuss this relationship challenge with a trusted friend, a close family member, a counselor, or a coach, to get the support you need to **be the *chooser*** in your life and relationship.

If you want support and are ready to take bold strides toward having the relationship that you truly want, I invite you to have a one-on-one chat with me to talk about it. Just go to **MeetWithMelissa.com** to request a Relationship Problem-Solving Consultation and you can start improving your relationship today:

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