

Addicts Best Advice: Beginning to Date

- 1) Heal First. Wait for your program to stabilize. Take the time you need to work through celibacy, to develop support, and to understand your addiction. Most who took this time felt it was the greatest gift they could have given themselves.
- 2) Take time to be known. You have plenty of time. Aim for friendship. Avoid urgency. Enjoy yourself.
- 3) Be selective. Only date people in whose presence you feel most like yourself. If you find yourself slipping into shame--feeling the need to defend yourself or seek approval—consider it a warning.
- 4) Share your plan. When dating becomes steady, share how and under what terms you want to be sexual. Elicit from your partner his or her reactions to this as well as his or her intentions and values.
- 5) Share your recovery. Tell your partner about your history so you are not carrying a secret. There are two critical things to remember here: 1) If it is not safe enough to share this fact about yourself, it is not safe to be sexual, and 2) if you are sexual before your partner knows your history, it may be perceived as a betrayal when he or she does find out. If your partner accepts you a recovering person, your fears of abandonment will dissipate.
- 6) Do pre-dates and post-dates with others. Before and after dates, check it out with others, especially if you have any anxiety. No one does it perfectly. Everyone makes mistakes. The real problems arise when you cease to share your process.
- 7) Remember: This is a date, not an encounter group. Acknowledge your feelings. If you feel anxious or awkward, say so. Watch the intensity, however. You do not have to tell your life history or share childhood pain the first evening. Trust should be incremental, not instantaneous. Build up some history with your date; spend some time together first.
- 8) Beware of cosmic relationships. Intensity is not intimacy. Fast-forwarding the future—as when after a very brief courtship you are certain you have found “the one”—can be a fix for the emptiness of the present. Life mates are not determined in two days, even two dreamlike days. Many addicts spent one night that took years to untangle. There are magic evenings, however. Enjoy them. Listen to your intuitions. Trust history and recovery.