

UNDERSTANDING
DATING



THE **HOPE** LINE



Dating isn't always easy...

and that's okay

If you are finding yourself stuck in the dating cycle of one bad relationship ending and going right into the next. This guide is for you.

As you read on, you will find tips for what's been going wrong and how to start choosing something better.

Chat with a Hope Coach!

If you need someone to talk to, visit thehopeline.com/chat-live to chat with a Hope Coach about what you're experiencing. Hope Coaches are available 24/7 to listen and offer support whenever you need it.



BAD MINDSETS

THAT WILL LEAD YOUR DATING LIFE IN THE

WRONG DIRECTION

If you recognize any of the following mindsets in yourself, it's time to let them go. Healthy, strong, and thriving relationships are possible. Don't lose hope. It could just be that these mindsets are getting in the way.



"I'm afraid of being single"

Being alone can feel really scary. So scary that you might start losing yourself just to hold on to someone. **You convince yourself that a bad relationship is better than no relationship at all**, and before you know it, you're overlooking red flags and unhealthy behavior just to keep things from falling apart.

"I need this relationship to heal all the hurt in my life"

Sometimes we try to fill a deep ache or emptiness by looking for love in someone else. We all want to be loved. It's how we're wired. But when life has made you feel unworthy of love, that desire can start to take over. You begin to believe the next relationship will finally fix everything, that this person will meet every need. But that's a lot to put on someone—and it's just not something they can carry.





"I fall in love really fast"

The "high" of a new relationship can make you rush in before you've really gotten to know someone. You feel swept up, totally infatuated. And infatuation has a way of taking over. **It's intense, emotional, sometimes anxious, and often driven by passion and attraction.** You can become so focused on the other person that everything else fades into the background.

But that kind of intensity isn't always a reliable sign of real love. The high eventually fades. It always does. And if there hasn't been time to build trust, respect, and genuine, selfless love, what's left can feel confusing and disappointing.

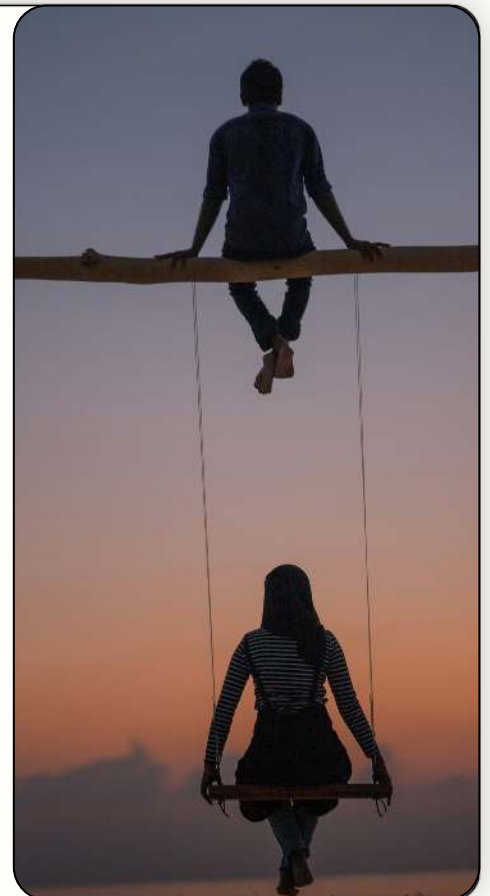
Sometimes we even convince ourselves a relationship is better than it really is, just to hold on to that exciting, feel-good rush, the kind that makes everything else in life seem dull by comparison.

"I can change them"

It's easy to step into a relationship thinking your love will change someone—that if you just care enough, they'll become who you need them to be. But the truth is, **real change only happens when a person chooses it for themselves.**

A disrespectful person will likely remain disrespectful. An addict may continue in their addiction. A cheater often keeps cheating until they decide to do the hard work of changing.

You can encourage someone, support them, and pray for them, but it's a mistake to believe your love alone will transform them. When you begin to understand this, it becomes easier to stop excusing unhealthy behavior and stop waiting for a change that may never come.



"I hate myself."

There are a lot of reasons you might struggle with self-esteem, and one of them could be an absent parent. **If you weren't nurtured and valued for who you are growing up, it can be hard to truly like or accept yourself.**

As you get older, that can turn into low self-worth—and with it, a deep pull to look for your value in a relationship, hoping a partner will give you the worth you've been missing.



"I was abandoned"

Sometimes, if you've experienced deep abandonment as a child, your mind finds ways to cope. You might have imagined being rescued by someone who truly loves you—a kind of hero who sees you, cares for you, and makes you feel valued and alive.

As you grow up, that longing can stay with you. You may find yourself searching for that "hero" in real life, hoping someone will finally make you feel whole and fulfilled.

"I feel like I need sex"

Sex can be powerful. It feels good, and it can even become addictive. But it's also deeply vulnerable, which means it's meant to be experienced in a relationship built on real trust and commitment. Without that foundation, it's easy to get pulled into a relationship that's driven mostly by physical connection, and still end up feeling empty or unseen for who you really are. There are also real consequences to consider, like pregnancy. That's why many people choose to wait until marriage—it places sex in a context where trust, commitment, and care are meant to be secure.

LOVE vs LUST

When you think about lust in the context of relationships, it really comes down to this: **are you valuing someone's body more than their soul?** Lust shows up when physical attraction takes center stage and who that person actually is starts to matter less.

Lust is an intense desire, but it's rooted in self-gratification. It's about what you want, what you feel, and what you can get—not about truly caring for the other person. And if you're honest, you've probably seen how easy it is to step into a relationship because of that pull. Maybe you've even believed someone loved you, when in reality they were just driven by desire.

The problem is, lust is self-focused. It doesn't stick around when things get hard or when it stops getting what it wants. **It takes, but it doesn't truly give.**

And yet, it's easy to convince yourself that this kind of connection will lead somewhere meaningful that it might turn into something lasting. But it doesn't.

So it's worth asking yourself: are you really in love, or are you just caught up in something that feels good right now but won't last?





HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE

LOVE

VS

LUST

is deep, steady affection

is intense sexual craving

is patient and willing to wait

is impatient and demanding

chooses commitment

avoids lasting commitment

seeks the other's good

seeks personal gain

is unconditional

is conditional

wants what's best for the other

wants personal satisfaction

builds trust

breeds jealousy and suspicion

gives freedom

controls and manipulates

protects and builds up

tears down and destroys

is honest and genuine

deceives and hides

HEALTHY STEPS FOR STARTING YOUR RELATIONSHIP THE RIGHT WAY

Take Care of Yourself

Develop a **HEALTHY** View of Love

Love isn't about finding someone to meet all your needs. It's about serving, giving, honoring, and putting the other person before yourself. It means genuinely wanting what's best for them and them wanting the same for you. At its core, love is about giving, not taking.



Know your **VALUE**

Know that you are valuable just as you are, and be secure in that truth. **Learn to stand on your own and accept yourself without needing a boyfriend or girlfriend to define your worth.** You have value as a friend, a family member, and as a child of God.

When we expect a relationship to fill the empty places in our hearts, we put an impossible burden on the other person. No one is perfect, and that kind of pressure will only lead to disappointment. Instead, grow in confidence in who you are, because secure people build secure relationships. When you're secure, you're not constantly questioning every move your partner makes or tying your worth to their actions.



Have **STANDARDS** and Stick to Them

Too many people go into dating without any real standards. If someone is attractive or gives them attention, that's enough—and they jump in without really knowing who that person is. It's like rolling the dice and hoping for the best, but more often than not, that doesn't end well.

It doesn't have to be that way. You're allowed to have boundaries, and you should. Decide ahead of time what actually matters to you—the kind of character, values, and behavior you're looking for—and don't ignore those just because someone is appealing in the moment. And if those boundaries get crossed, be willing to walk away. **The right person won't try to push past them—they'll respect them.**

Being intentional like this isn't being overly picky; it's being wise. Having clear standards protects you from wasting time on the wrong relationships and helps you recognize the right one when it comes along.

Be Willing to **WAIT** for the Right Person

It's okay if you're not dating right now. You're not missing out on something essential, and you're definitely not going to fall apart without a boyfriend or girlfriend. There's no rush, and there's nothing wrong with taking your time.

What really matters is who you choose to let into your life. The wrong relationship can hurt you in ways that stick. Being treated poorly, disrespected, or emotionally wounded can leave scars that take time to heal. And honestly, that kind of pain is a lot heavier than just being alone for a season.

So don't settle just to have someone. It's far better to wait than to end up with someone who isn't good for you.



Take It Slow...

Real trust, respect, and genuine love don't happen overnight. Those things take time to grow. They're built through patience, commitment, and a solid foundation—usually starting with a friendship that's been tested and proven over time.

But we live in a culture that pushes instant gratification. We're used to getting what we want right away, so it's easy to expect relationships to work the same way. The problem is, healthy relationships don't grow that way. They require time, effort, and a willingness to put someone else ahead of yourself.

That's why it's so important to slow down and really get to know someone before jumping into dating. As you take that time, you might realize this isn't a relationship worth pursuing, and that's actually a good thing. It's much better to recognize that early than to get emotionally invested and find out too late.

DANGERS of Moving too Quickly

- You say things you don't really mean.
- You make promises you can't keep.
- You make decisions you wouldn't normally make.
- You get into situations that are hard to get out of.
- You create expectations you're not ready to meet.
- You rely on your feelings instead of what's actually true.
- You don't give the relationship time to grow in a healthy way.
- You complicate things by adding physical intimacy too soon.
- You start chasing emotional highs, and normal begins to feel boring.
- You spend too much time together and slowly push friends out of your life.
- You buy into the myth of "love at first sight"—when it's really just chemistry, not love.





Mutual Respect

Mutual respect is the foundation of any strong, lasting relationship. No one wants to be with someone who constantly puts themselves above their partner or makes them feel small. Feeling valued and honored matters. **If you're in a relationship, it's important to both give respect and expect it in return. It should go both ways.**

WAYS TO SHOW **RESPECT**

1. SUPPORT THEM

Encourage and support your boyfriend or girlfriend. Build them up, remind them you believe in them, and point out their strengths and gifts.

2. RESPECT THEIR FAMILY

Even if things aren't perfect, their family is a big part of who they are, and honoring that shows you value them.

3. STAY LOYAL

don't flirt with other people. It might seem obvious, but it matters.

4. ESTABLISH TRUST

Be trustworthy, and choose to trust them too. Keep your word, follow through on what you say, and don't constantly question or doubt them.

5. TREAT THEM WELL IN PUBLIC

Include them in conversations, speak highly of them, and show that you're proud to be with them. Stand up for them when it counts.



Note for Girls

Don't put him down—especially in front of other people.

Even if he brushes it off, it still hurts. When you choose to encourage him instead, you're building him up in a way that really matters.

Ask for his opinion and actually listen.

A lot of guys want to feel valued and respected for what they think, so take time to hear him out.

Don't use your body to manipulate him.

You have influence, and it's important to use it in a way that's honest and respectful—not by leading him on or playing games.

Be patient when he struggles to express himself.

Opening up doesn't always come easily for guys, so give him space to find his words instead of speaking for him.

Remember, you don't own him.

Being in a relationship doesn't mean controlling his time or expecting him to be available 24/7. Healthy space is part of a healthy relationship.



Note for Guys

Speak to her with kindness

Keep your language clean. Avoid crude jokes, swearing, or anything inappropriate. Be mindful of your words. Don't joke about her body or make comments that are hurtful.

Honor her boundaries

Never try to pressure or take advantage of her in any way, especially sexually.

Pay attention to her

Be present. Give her your time and attention, listen carefully, and make space for her thoughts and feelings.

Learn to read the moment

Know when it's time to joke and when it's time to be serious—don't treat her the same way you would your guy friends.

Respect her emotions

Don't try to control or manipulate how she feels; that only shows a lack of genuine care and respect.



DATING TEST

When you're trying to figure out if someone would be a good boyfriend or girlfriend, **here are 6 key questions to ask.**

1 Can I trust them?

Can you trust them to look out for you and not take advantage of you? Do you feel confident they'll speak well of you, tell you the truth, and make good choices even when you're not around, like at a party? Can you open up to them and know they'll handle it with care? If the answer is no, it's probably better to save yourself the hurt and not step into that relationship.

2 Do I know what they're really like?

Do they keep things surface-level, or are they actually willing to let you see who they really are? Are they open to talking about more than just interests like their faith, values, and goals for their life? If they stay closed off, it might be a sign to step back.

3 How do they react under pressure?

How someone reacts under pressure can tell you a lot about who they really are. Stress has a way of bringing out a person's true character, whether that's patience, anger, honesty, or self-control. Pay attention to how they handle difficult moments, disagreements, or unexpected challenges. Do they stay steady and respectful, or do they shut down or lash out? Those responses can give you a clearer picture of what being in a relationship with them would actually look like.





4

Do they have a good reputation?

Talk to people who know them well. Everyone has a reputation, and it's usually there for a reason. Most of the time, it gives you a pretty accurate picture of who someone is. Just make sure you're involving trusted friends and looking for honest insight, not getting pulled into gossip, as you try to understand their true character.

5

Do you share the same values?

Long-term compatibility is hard to build if you don't share the same core beliefs and values. What you believe on a deeper, spiritual level shapes how you see the world and the decisions you make. If you're not aligned there, it can create tension over time, and a lot of relationships struggle to last because of it.

6

Do they treat you with respect?

A lack of respect can tear down a relationship faster than almost anything else. You know your worth, so don't settle for someone who treats you like you matter any less. A healthy relationship means they respect you fully—your body, your boundaries, and your beliefs. And when someone truly respects you, they won't try to push those boundaries—they'll honor them and see them as worth protecting.

THE
HOPE
True
Connection **LINE**

How to **BE THERE FOR YOUR FRIEND** facing relationship challenges.

Here are some things you can do to help a friend who may be making poor relationship choices or is stuck in an unhealthy relationship:

Be a source of **ENCOURAGEMENT.**

Since low self-worth is often one of the main reasons people enter and stay in unhealthy relationships, it's important to build your friend up. Remind them that many people besides the person they're dating love and care about them. Let your friend know that you will be there for them if the relationship ends, and reassure them that they do not need to be afraid of being alone.



Help them **EVALUATE** if they are being loved well.

Use the materials in this guide to help them evaluate their relationship. You could also use this Bible verse as a reference for what true love looks like.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)



Look for warning signs of **LOVE ADDICTION**

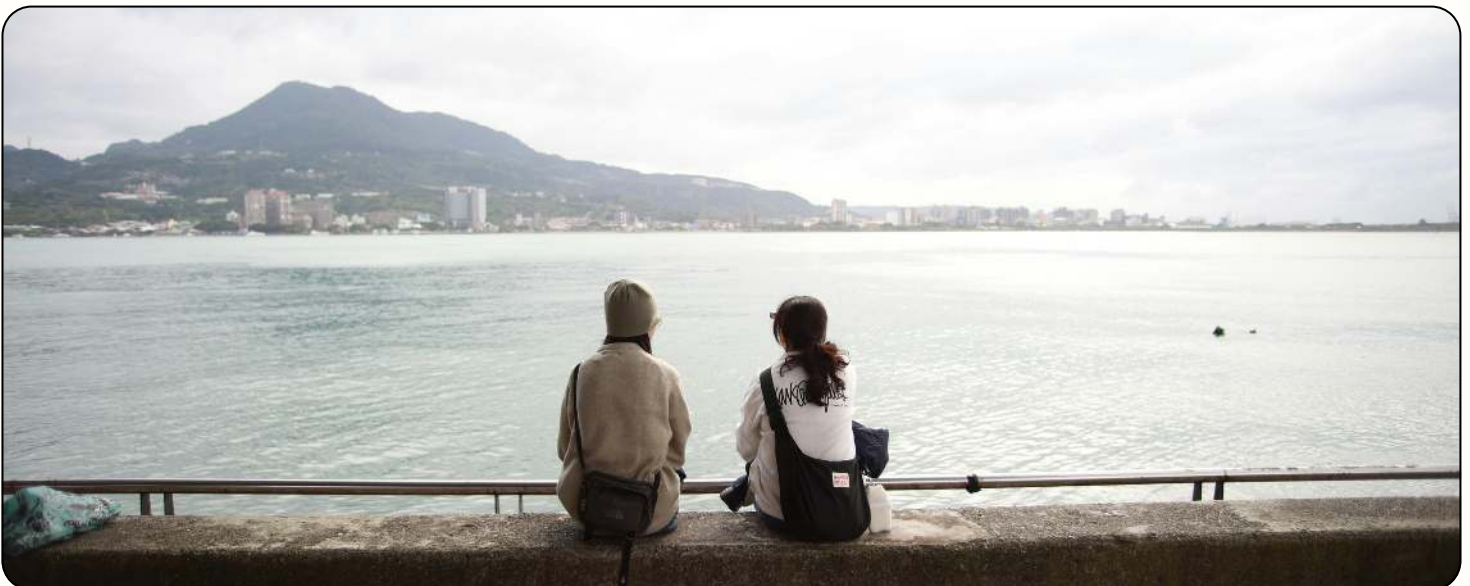
Is your friend obsessed with the person they are dating? Have they changed who they are to keep the relationship going? Do they move quickly from one relationship to another?

If so, they may be struggling with love addiction and using a boyfriend or girlfriend to numb hurt in their life. In that case, you can gently, and without judgment, point out that they are placing impossible expectations on another person to meet all their needs. You can also ask thoughtful questions or encourage them to seek counseling to help uncover any deeper pain they may be trying to cover up with the feeling of being loved.



Share this **GUIDE** with them

Share this Guide with any friend or loved one who is struggling with relationship issues. There may be something in it that really resonates with them. You can also explore more helpful resources or encourage them to [chat with a Hope Coach at TheHopeLine.com!](#)



A *Spiritual* Perspective

Love is one of the deepest forces that moves the world. We are all wired to love and to be loved. But in our broken, sinful world, love is often distorted and corrupted. True, pure love can only come from God.

No matter what you think about church or organized religion, the truth is we were created for a meaningful relationship with God. He is the only One who can give us real peace and confidence—whether you're in a relationship or feel completely alone.

In a very real sense, you are never totally alone if you have a relationship with God. He is willing to fill the emptiness in your soul and guide you toward the right person, at the right time.

God loves us far more deeply than we could ever love ourselves. His love is so great that He sent His Son for us. As the Bible says: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

—John 3:16

Take time to seek and know God. He alone has the power to transform your heart, your life, and your understanding of love.

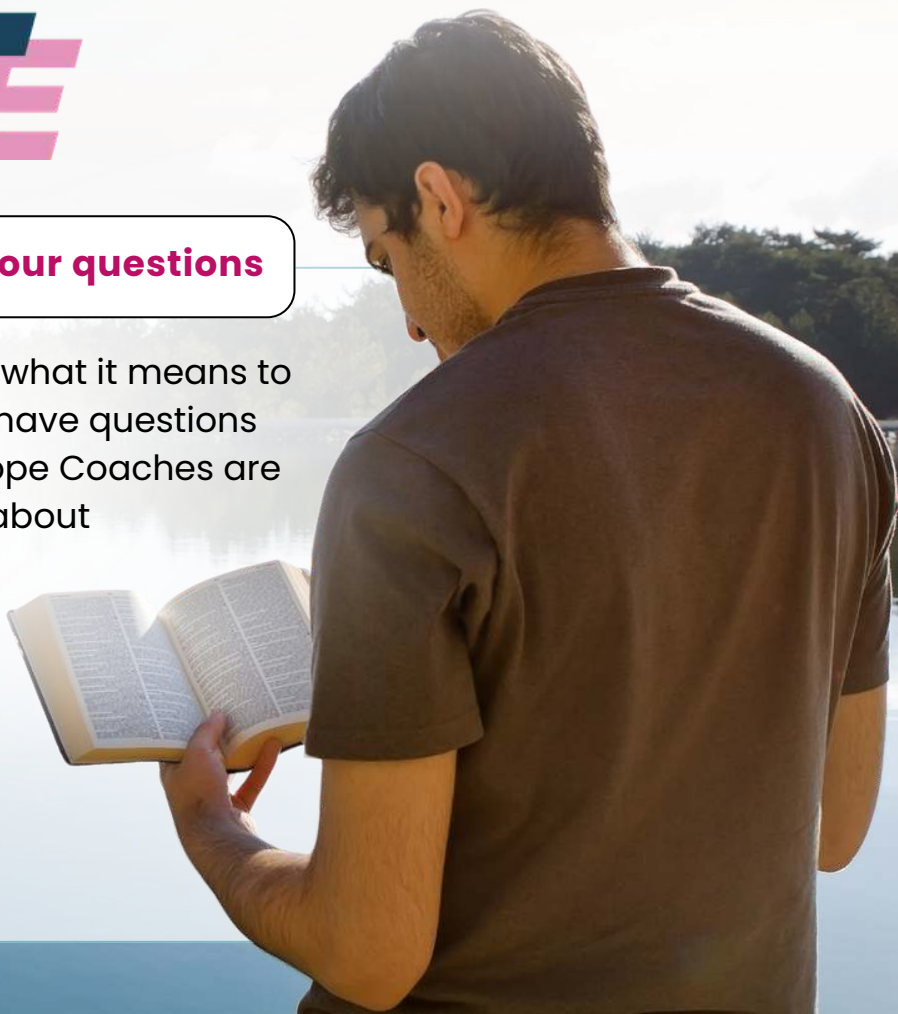


Talk with someone about your questions

If you want to know more about what it means to have a relationship with God or have questions about the topic of dating, our Hope Coaches are available 24/7 to chat with you about whatever is on your mind.



← **CHAT
LIVE WITH
A HOPE
COACH**



THE HOPE LINE

Our mission is to help students and young adults in crisis by offering sound advice and a safe place to connect. Through our online resources and the ability to chat live with a Hope Coach 24/7, we are here to help people make a true connection.

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