

# Seven Secrets for Spotting & Dealing with Red Flags

*by Mari Smith*

Knowing what to look for and when to trust your gut in a new dating situation is a critical skill for singles. Here are seven tips for making the screening process much more effective.

## **1. Review your relationship criteria consistently.**

Make sure your requirements are relationship-specific and not person-specific. You must know what you are looking for. How else would you know whether something is a red flag? Notice whether a red flag is related to a non-negotiable.

Ask yourself, *"Could a relationship work for me if this situation continued?"*

## **2. Never assume.**

Our minds are "meaning making machines!" We automatically make up meanings for everything that happens in our lives. When we stop to question the meanings we make, it can be very freeing... especially if you are willing to share your experience with your partner and ask for clarification. Often you will be amazed at how far off your interpretation was!

## **3. Take personal responsibility.**

Notice when something feels off inside and be willing to communicate to your partner/date in a compassionate, direct and responsible way, using "I" language. Make a commitment to telling your truth.

## **4. Use compassionate communication.**

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) - also known as Compassionate Communication - is a powerful tool for effectively communicating your feelings and needs. You will automatically create deeper intimacy using this model alone.

The four steps are (1) Observation, (2) Feeling, (3) Needs and (4) Request.

An example would be: *"John, when you arrived 30 minutes after our agreed upon time, I felt frustrated as I have a need for keeping agreements. In future, would you be willing to call me on my cell phone if you are delayed?"*

Or, if you are feeling particularly emotional, you can ask the other person to reflect back what they heard you say first before making your request by saying something like *"Can you tell me what you're hearing me say?"*

An excellent book to learn more about this powerful technique is, "Nonviolent Communication - A Language of Life: Create Your Life, Your Relationships, and Your World in Harmony with Your Values" by Marshall B. Rosenberg, the creator of NVC. Please visit Marshall's site at <http://cnvc.org>.

#### **5. Create your own personal "yardstick".**

You can measure the degree of importance or relevance when a red flag comes up. For example, ask yourself, *"On a scale of 1-10, how upset am I that my date arrived 30 minutes late? 1= no problem, I enjoyed the chance to relax, and 10 = I was furious and it spoiled my whole evening."*

In this example, depending on how upset you were, it could be related to your need for keeping agreements, having integrity, being responsible or being respectful.

#### **6. Ask yourself either/or questions.**

When we ask ourselves an either/or question, we don't give our minds a chance to waver on the answer. The right answer - for you - is *instantly known* from your gut, from your subconscious mind.

For example, you could have your own inner code for evaluating red flags such as asking yourself, *"Is this a yes or a no?", "Is this a green light or a red light?", "Is this a yum or a yuk?"*

An excellent book with either/or questions is "[The Right Questions: 10 Essential Questions to Guide You to an Extraordinary Life](#)" by Debbie Ford.

## **7. Include friends and family.**

Make sure you are not always alone with your date. Be sure to include yourself in your partner's life by meeting his friends, family members and children, if applicable. Pay close attention to your date's behavior around other people.

- Are they relaxed and comfortable, or do they seem awkward?
- Does their behavior change when others are around?
- Do they treat you differently?

Introduce your date to your own friends and family members. Ask the people you are close to for their feedback.

- What did they think of your date?
- Did they notice anything in particular?
- Just as important, what did they notice about you?
- Did you act different?

Be sure to vary the locations and activities for your dates. Don't always meet at the same place at the same time and do the same things. For example, you could meet up for Sunday brunch, then a weekday lunch, then hiking on a Saturday afternoon, the theater on Friday night and a workshop on a weekday evening... you get the picture!