

## SEEKING AND KEEPING YOUR NEXT RELATIONSHIP

How many New Year's Resolutions are about relationships - either looking for one or swearing not to have another one where you get hurt.

So many of us are expert self-saboteurs when it comes to finding and keeping a relationship. It can be challenging to keep our perceptions of what we're looking for in a relationship separate from the socio-cultural and media influences - or of course what our mates say!

Our parents or care-givers have a major impact on the partners we choose, or our interest in potential partners. We either conform or rebel to what we experienced when we were young. Additionally, research indicates that we prefer partners 'similar' to us - that is, in educational qualifications, socio-economic standing, beliefs and traditions. We are also influenced by our parents when it comes to what type of attachments we seek in a relationship. As an example, how close or distant our family members were, or are, to each other will influence the level of together time or space we need from our relationships.

We all know communication is key to good relationships, but many of us may not understand that our style of communication isn't just 'who we are' (i.e. 'she's so bubbly', 'he's so quiet'), but actually a set of habits that we've learnt. These habits may enable us to maintain 'defences' against the world and, potentially, love. Therefore, not sabotaging our search for a new relationship includes being clear about what we are communicating to others, and why; and about our needs and wants, both at the emotional and practical level of a relationship.



Researcher Stan Tatkin's theory on emotional involvements says that we have a preferred position in relation to intimacy and closeness, although we may take different positions in different situations. Tatkin names the three positions as Island, Wave and Anchor.

Recognising your partner's attachment style helps you to understand why they have different emotional reactions including when dealing with conflict. When both partners clearly understand each other's needs, then good communication can be a lifeboat to help improve your relationship.

People whose preferred position tends to be the *Island*:

- like to be alone, enjoy their own space
- have been raised to be self-sufficient and tend to avoid people
- learn early on not to depend on people
- often feel crowded in intimate relationships
- appear to be in a world of their own
- self-soothe and self-stimulate
- do not turn to others for soothing or stimulation
- find it hard to shift from being alone to interacting
- under express their thoughts and feelings
- process a lot internally.

People whose preferred position tends to be the *Wave*:

- feel a great deal with their emotions
- have strong attachments in childhood, but they were inconsistent
- have helped soothe a parent or both parents who were overwhelmed
- have felt rejected or turned away by one or both parents
- focus on external regulation - asking others for help to be soothed
- find it hard to shift from interacting to being alone
- over-express and like to talk about all the details
- stay in close physical contact to others
- often think they are too much and that nobody can tolerate them.

People whose preferred position tends to be the *Anchor*:

- come from a family where there was an emphasis on relationship
- have experienced justice, fairness and sensitivity in their family
- love to collaborate and work with others
- read faces and voices, and deal with difficult people well.

Find our more here: <https://clintonpower.com.au/2012/07/wired-for-love/>

# Common myths about Dating

**Myth:** There's one soul mate out there for me.

**Busted:** We tend to be believers in the 'mythology of love' and think there is only one true love out there. Hence, when we meet people, we try to mould them into the perfect soul mate for ourselves, which can have disastrous consequences. The truth is that the best relationships happen when both parties actively work on their connection. The myth of the soul mate creates unrealistic expectations and can cause people to shift responsibility away from improving themselves or nurturing their relationship.

**Myth:** Relationships shouldn't be work.

**Busted:** Remember that good relationships are not left on 'auto pilot'. Couples need to consciously steer their relationship or it will go off course.

**Myth:** Isn't intimacy just sex?

**Busted:** Most of us inherit our ideas about relationships from movies or fictional stories. Intimacy is about 'really' getting to know another person - what John Gottman calls 'Love Maps' in his Sound Relationship House model (covered in our last issue of EAP Newsletter). Trust is intangible, but we know when it's gone. Do we know how to build it?

**Myth:** Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

**Busted:** Nope. It damages relationships and trust.

**Myth:** It's too hard to meet someone here. There are too few men/not enough women in the right age bracket/all my friends are couples.

**Busted:** Make a plan for dating as you do for work tasks. Do things differently from your usual routine. Anticipate the type of emotional rejection you may feel and get a support person to coach you along.

## Ideas to launch 'single you' into 2018

- Admit that you can learn something different about how you perceive being single!
- Do some investigation into understanding your own values before embarking on finding 'the one'. Ultimately, having similar values is going to keep you with a love partner, and it doesn't help if you've never thought much about your values and where you got them from. Show your values from the inside out.
- Dating IS a numbers game. If you are spending many hours either at the gym or on the couch, or staring at a computer screen, or socialising with your friends, there are very few hours left for you to meet someone in 2018.
- Do less of the 'pack game' of hanging out with mates (male or female) and spend quality time one on one with potential partners.
- Develop a 'self-reflective' gene that doesn't just make assumptions or blame, but seeks to understand what's happening in the micro-moments of relating to a new potential love interest.
- Be aware and informed about the disadvantages of online dating i.e. superficiality, instant judgement, promoting sexual intimacy before getting to know each other.
- Ask a trusted friend how flexible you are in seeing all of a person, not just their looks, qualifications and external qualities.