

# Are you Ready to Date?

## Objective

To prepare yourself for dating following the end of a relationship.

## You Should Know

Putting yourself out there after the end of a marriage or long-term relationship can make you feel uncomfortable, awkward, or vulnerable. This might be especially true now that dating often begins online.

Following a break-up, everyone has their own timeline for when they might want to begin dating. After a relationship ends, you can begin to prepare yourself for dating through self-reflection – both processing your emotions and identifying what you can do better in future relationships. When you decide to begin dating depends on your resilience and ability to let go of the past. Of course, if you have children, dating will be further complicated.

Here are issues to consider when you re-enter the dating scene:

- **End one relationship before starting another.** No matter how your last relationship ended, pausing between relationships gives you time so you avoid dating out of desperation.
- **Identify what you have learned from the past.** You will probably repeat unhelpful patterns if you fail to identify what did not work well in previous relationships. Consider how you want to grow as a person and as a partner in your next relationship. The more you take responsibility for your part in previous relationships, the more likely you will have a successful relationship in the future.
- **Forgive, let go, and move forward.** If you find yourself angry, bitter, or resentful about previous relationships, you might have more work to do to prepare yourself for dating.
- **Admit if you need help.** Seek help from a therapist or support group to work through any lingering issues.
- **Get a life.** Build a strong network of nurturing friendships and enjoyable activities to sustain you through the ups and downs of dating.

This worksheet will help you prepare yourself for dating following the end of a relationship.

## What to Do

Below are a series of questions and checklists. Be as honest as you can as you answer these questions.

**Are you ready to date after ending your relationship?** If you are not emotionally stable and ready to connect with dating partners, you might feel confused and unhappy, or sabotage potentially positive connections. So, what are the signs you might not be ready? Check off the statements that apply to you:

\_\_\_\_ You consider contacting your ex whenever you have a problem.

- Your ex still has some of your possessions.
- You think about your ex daily.
- You are not comfortable running into them in public.
- You closely watch them on social media.
- You are interested in who they are dating.
- You want to date only to stop thinking about them.
- You agonize over what went wrong in your last relationship.
- You are resentful, bitter, or angry.
- You have not examined how you contributed to the successes and failures of past relationships.

If you checked off five or more statements, you might not be ready to date. So, it might be wise to give yourself more time and identify what you need to move forward.

Describe whether or not you think you are ready to date.

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Why do you want to start dating?

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If your 'why' includes a desire to avoid painful feelings like hurt, anger, or loneliness, then it might be helpful to take some time to heal before dating.

Dating requires a certain amount of vulnerability, tolerance of uncertainty, and willingness to feel a range of emotions. If you have taken the time to heal and you *want* to date (more than you *need* to date) you are more likely to experience successful dating.

**Do you fear commitment?** Many people who experience a breakup develop certain fears, including the fear of betrayal or commitment. Mark off any of the following signs you are afraid of commitment:

- You dislike becoming attached to people.
- You think a new relationship might hold you back.

\_\_\_ You dislike monogamy or want to date multiple people.

\_\_\_ You are not over your ex.

\_\_\_ When you start developing feelings, you flee.

\_\_\_ You want sex more than a relationship.

If you checked off three or more statements, you are probably afraid to commit. It is normal to fear commitment following the end of a relationship. If you are afraid to connect, avoid leading anyone to believe otherwise. Be clear about your intentions, and if they agree, go for a no-strings-attached connection.

Discuss how you feel about commitment. Be specific.

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**What are your intentions?** Knowing and understanding your intentions means knowing yourself and getting a grasp on your dating goals. Answer the following questions.

Do you know what you want from a new partner? Have you figured out your relationship “must-haves” and “deal-breakers”? Describe below.

Must-Haves:

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Deal Breakers:

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What are the values you are most looking for? Write down what you are looking for in a partner.

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Are you self-confident? Why or why not?

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Are you independent? Why or why not?

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Are you looking for someone to take care of you? Explain.

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Do you easily express yourself and what you want? If not, what can you do to express yourself in a clear and direct way? Describe.

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**How do you define “dating”?** What are the first words you think of when you hear the word “dating?”

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If you answered “awful” or “painful,” try reframing your definition of dating. Imagine that dating as an *experience* or an *adventure* – something new and exciting. And remember, not every date should be about finding “the one.”

**Are you making an effort?** If you feel ready to date, it is time to put yourself out there to meet new people. Check off activities you are willing to do.

\_\_\_\_ Join your colleagues at after-work activities.

\_\_\_\_ Attend Facebook or Meet Up events.

\_\_\_\_ Say “yes” to invitations to unexpected social events.

\_\_\_\_ Use public transportation and chat with people you see regularly.

\_\_\_\_ Volunteer for an organization.

\_\_\_\_ Be open to conversations with strangers; for example, at the park or in the grocery store.

\_\_\_\_ Start a new activity like joining a hiking club or taking dance lessons.

\_\_\_\_ Try a dating app like Match.com, OKCupid, or eHarmony. *If you are considering online dating, do research into which ones offer the experience you are looking for: some are suited to people looking for long-term partners, others are for casual flings. Make sure you are aware of the scams that target online daters.*

Now, choose at least one of the activities you checked off to try it within the next week.

What will you do? \_\_\_\_\_

After you have done the activity, describe what happened.

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Are you willing to do at least one activity each week to meet new people? Why or why not?

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**Do you have expectations?** Here are some signs you might have expectations:

- Have a rigid set of ideas about your “ideal partner,” from appearance to financial status.
- Expect your partner to spend all their free time with you.
- Have prejudices or beliefs you are unwilling to reconsider.
- Expect your partner to agree with everything you say.

- Compare your relationship with others people's relationships.

Are you willing to release some of your expectations? Why or why not?

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It might take some time and multiple dates with several people before you meet someone suitable for a relationship. Are you willing to go on multiple dates? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not?

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Now that you have answered the questions and completed the checklists, you are now more aware of what you can do to prepare for dating! You are probably clear about what you want, and you have learned from past mistakes.

Now, consider what else you can do to make the transition into dating easier? Is there anything else you can do to prepare yourself? Be specific.

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What are obstacles to dating you have identified?

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**How (and when) will you tell your kids you are dating? (if applicable)** Therapists suggest spending at least six months getting to know someone before you introduce them to your children. Introducing someone too soon can be confusing for children, and it is a good idea to talk with your kids about their feelings – letting them know it is okay to be angry, nervous, or sad. Encourage them to ask questions and express their concerns. You might tell your children you made a “new friend” that you would like to get to know. Describe below how/when/what you will tell your children you are dating:

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

Now that you have completed this exercise, do you feel prepared to date? Why or why not?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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