

Is This the One?

by Leslie Kausch, M.Ed. LPC, Licensed Counselor



My client had been in a series of long relationships, all problematic, some abusive. After convincing herself that she would never date again, she met someone who seemed different from the rest. With some hope and skepticism, she wondered if this was the one she was waiting for.

Relationships are messy. And most of us have had at least one relationship with someone who didn't treat us well. So how can we tell whether a relationship can work? First of all, it's a good idea to take some time after a break up to pause. Let your heart break, and take stock of what went wrong, including how you contributed to the relationship being unworkable. Looking in the mirror while you are grieving can be hard, but it is essential to getting your own act together better before you try to move into a new relationship.

Next, think afresh about the kind of person you'd like to be in relationship with. Specifically, think about what characteristics (honesty, ambition, physical health, financial stability, kindness, etc.) would be in the following categories:

Must Haves: What basic characteristics do you insist on in a partner. That is, without these characteristics, you're not interested.

Preferred: You'd like your partner to have these characteristics, but it's not a deal-breaker if they're missing.

Rather Not: You'd like your partner to NOT have these characteristics, but it's not a deal-breaker if they're present.

No ways: Presence of these characteristics mean the deal of off – this is not the person for you.

Finally, ask yourself these 3 questions:

Do you like the person? It sounds pretty basic, but some people find that, when they separate the person from the good feelings they get from being 'in love', they don't actually like their partner.

Can you keep perspective when you are with this person? Are you overwhelmed by feeling bad about yourself, OR feeling dreamy and 'really good'? Some of the rush of being 'in love' is normal, but if there's something about being with this person that makes it harder for you to see things clearly and think rationally about your decisions, this is probably not the right relationship.

Can you handle the places where this person gets tight or can't think? All of us have areas that we are smarter about than others. It makes sense to make sure that you can identify where this person can't think, then decide if you can deal with them. If this person isn't financially stable, or gets explosively angry, this may be more than it makes sense for you to take on.

My client spent several sessions working through these ideas, before bringing her new love in for a few sessions of couples counseling. We strategized about what they each wanted from the relationship and how they could best support each other.

There are always possibilities to improve relationships, but putting work in at the beginning can increase the odds that a relationship will last. Especially when you start by working on you.

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