

Love

How to Meet Someone Without Online Dating

For starters, try switching up your routine.

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While dating apps kept many of our love lives afloat during the earlier stages of the pandemic, now—as restrictions ease, countries open their borders, and people feel more comfortable socializing in person—you may be tired of swiping every which way in search of romance and are wondering how to meet someone without online dating. After over two years of not only virtual dates, but also two-dimensional friend hangs and—the poster child for tech fatigue—Zoom meetings, an in-person connection might be extremely appealing. And even before the pandemic, dating apps could be pretty demoralizing.

“Even though dating apps reported that more people signed up during the pandemic, that doesn't mean it was any easier to find someone,” Anita A. Chlipala, LMFT, founder of Relationship Reality 312 and author of *First Comes Us: The Busy Couple's Guide to Lasting Love*, tells SELF. “It's so common to match with someone who never responds to your message, or takes several days to answer a question, or it's a one-sided conversation. It can seem like such a waste of time, which just adds to the frustration and fatigue.”

That's not to say that dating apps can't be a great way to meet someone you click with. They're convenient, they allow you to seek out like-minded people, and, if you use them strategically, they absolutely have the potential to help you find what (and who) you're looking for. But if you're over the apps at the moment and/or ready to try something new—or, rather, something that people did for centuries before technology got involved—it might be worth it to try to meet three-dimensional people.

For one thing, you can assess attraction and chemistry faster and more accurately in person—photos and witty texts tell you very little about whether you'll be into someone IRL, Chlipala says. And in the flesh interactions also give you a chance to see someone in action before going on that first date. For example, you can observe how they treat people around them, the tone they use when talking—which rarely translates well over dating apps—and other important characteristics and potential red flags that might be

missed on an app.

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How to meet someone without online dating

Putting yourself out there without the comfort of a screen in hand can feel daunting these (increasingly tech-centric) days; it's taking a risk that many of us have become unaccustomed to—especially after a couple of years in relative isolation. That's why we reached relationship therapists for advice. Here are the top tips they gave us:

Switch up your usual routine—even a little bit.

The odds aren't in your favor to meet someone new if you're going to the same places over and over again. But you don't need to become a different person in order to open up new opportunities for connection, either. Even getting slightly out of your comfort zone can help, [Marquita Johnson, LPC](#), founder of [MC3: Millennial Counseling Coaching & Consulting](#) and author of [Being the One: B12 The Relationship Vitamin](#), tells SELF. "Take a different way to work or to the gym, try a new restaurant or coffee shop nearby, or join a meetup around an activity you love," she says. That way you won't feel completely out of your element, but you'll expose yourself to new people—who you can practice chatting up (per Chlipala's advice below).

Another way to tweak your usual routine to increase your odds of meeting a match? Commit to regularly making a little room in your schedule for new experiences—even if it's only a few hours each month. "Set a goal to do something you normally wouldn't every other week or every month, say, where you could potentially meet someone in person," Chlipala suggests. "Whether it's attending a networking event, an alumni group outing, or meeting up with friends at a festival—the idea is to make a point to say 'yes' to

more opportunities than usual.”

Look (and act!) like you’re open to meeting new people.

Both Chlipala and Johnson agree that open and welcoming body language is key to being approachable. If you’re out and about listening to Beyoncé’s “Break My Soul” on repeat with AirPods in, you’ll probably look like you’re busy and don’t want to be bothered (which, fine, in this case, is probably accurate). However, being more in the moment and aware of your surroundings can both communicate to others that you’re open to conversation and allow you to notice (cute!) people around you—people you might want to talk to. Chlipala says that people have become so reliant on apps and the comfort of being on the other side of their phone, they often fail to capitalize on the opportunities in front of them.

Earbuds and headphones aren’t the only way to close yourself off to possible romantic connection. Talking only to your friends at parties and keeping your head in your phone on public transportation or in a checkout line can send the “I’m not interested” message, too, says Johnson. That’s not to say you can never get lost in a true crime podcast on a walk, or that you always have to be open to chatting up strangers, but being aware of the vibe you’re giving off may help you increase your chances of finding a mate in the wild.

From there, start with low-stakes small talk.

You don’t have to chat with strangers about the weather (though, to be fair, climate change makes for stimulating conversation), but exchanging pleasantries or witty remarks when the opportunity arises can be a great way to meet new people and get more comfortable interacting with someone you’re attracted to. Regularly striking up conversations is about developing the mindset of looking for opportunities to make a connection wherever you go, Chlipala explains. Sometimes that might pan out into a date, sometimes (most times, even!) it won’t, but you won’t know unless you try, she says.

“It’s important to honor where you are with your comfort level, though,” Chlipala says. “If the idea of talking to someone you find super attractive makes your palms sweat, practice with a stranger, acquaintance, or colleague—someone you feel neutral toward—until you get more confident.” This can look like a playful comment about a snack in

someone's cart at the grocery store, or asking a friend of a friend what dishes or drinks they recommend at a restaurant bar.

Work through your fear of rejection.

Being rejected by an avatar on an app can be less painful than getting turned down by a real-life human, so brace yourself for the fact that dating in person might sting more than you expected it to. But also remind yourself that you will not be every person's brand of fun, just like not every person you meet will be what you're looking for. If a fear of rejection is holding you back from in-person connection, Chlipala suggests building up resilience by continuously putting your situation in perspective.

If someone, say, doesn't flirt back, or says no to a date invitation, practice positive self-talk to soothe the sting—and make it easier to move on to other potential connections. “Instead of thinking things like, I'm such a loser, I'll be alone forever, you can try something like, Well at least I tried and I won't wonder what could have happened. It might just take a little more time to find someone,” Chlipala says.

The exact words you use aren't so important; what's important is sticking to the facts versus blaming yourself or catastrophizing—it didn't work out this time, but that doesn't mean there's something wrong with you, or that it won't work out with someone else in the future.

Remember why you're doing all of this—and have fun (remember fun?)

Sure, when you're actively looking for someone great with whom you can potentially hook up or fall in love with, all this putting yourself out there business can feel like a job. But Johnson recommends thinking of dating as an adventure and reminding yourself *why* you're doing it—because you want to find someone you like, not because you feel obligated (hopefully).

With all the ups and downs and interesting experiences that can come with trying to meet new people, treating it like a job doesn't do the process justice. “Have fun with dating,” Johnson says. “I tell clients to try not to be so eager and fixated on the outcome, and to focus on the moment and embrace the process instead.”

Ultimately, even if you get rejected or have a boring or weird date, you have nothing to lose (as long as you're safe, of course). In fact, if it sucks, you at least get great fodder for your next brunch date with friends—or your future memoir.

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