



Dating in the real world

By Amy Skinner, MA, LPC, NCC, ACS, RPT-S

“I am done with on-line dating!” Suzanne emphatically declared. “Oh no, what happened?” I asked. A few months ago Suzanne had passionately researched on-line dating options for people over 60, and landed on a few sites that focused on her age-range, retirement status, and her religious beliefs.

We talked through how to spot scams (e.g. a man in his 40’s from another country asking for personal details without giving any of his own), how to manage notifications and contact (start with on-line communication before setting up a coffee meet-up), what to include and exclude from her profile and settings (share she loves the outdoors and the mountains, but don’t exclude potential dates from down in town), and finally how not to take anything personally (the hardest part!).

“I went on a few dates with Clark. He seemed like a great guy: divorced, adult kids who live nearby, cute grandkids, golfer, and active in his church.” “Ok, sounds good so far,” I mused. “Yeah. But Amy, I’m not attracted to him. He’s got an old-man bod.” “Wait, what?” I asked. “His hair is thinning, he has a paunch, and his clothes are kind of worn. He doesn’t look anything like my husband.” “How old was your husband when he passed away Suzanne?” I gently asked. “40. He was forty years old.”

Trey excitedly shared, “I found the love of my life! She’s smart, funny, beautiful; we even love the same goofy sci-fi authors. Look, here’s a picture of us on our latest boarding trip!” Trey and his new girlfriend had huge smiles on their faces,

Originally published in *The Mountain-Ear*, www.themtneer.com.

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with a very steep run at A-Basin in the background.

As he entered his thirties, Trey had been working hard on “smart” dating. Previously he had focused mainly on physical characteristics and fitness abilities, and was having a hard time getting past a few dates. We had been working on him noticing genuine common interests (longevity in hobbies and activities), similar lifestyles (passionate about careers, connections in the community, solid home), emotional intelligence, and commitment to personal growth.

“What’s the problem?” I asked. “Why are your eyebrows scrunched up and the corners of your mouth turned down?” “She lives in Oregon,” Trey explained. “Her life is there, and mine is here. How is that ever going to work?”

“It’s a deal-breaker,” Joe declared. “What is?” I asked, barely sitting down for the session. “Her kids. I don’t want kids. I never wanted kids. I am not dad material.” I took a deep breath in and out, modeling emotional regulation, and waited for Joe to continue. As he fought back tears he went on, “I mean, her kids are the best. They’re smart, funny, cute, and so much fun to hang out with. I took them up to Eldora, and they could kind of keep up with me! Shoot Amy. What am I supposed to do?”

“I don’t know,” I quietly responded. “How does it feel, spending time with them?” “I mean, it’s the best feeling ever! But then I go home, to my quiet, empty apartment, and I think, I’m just not who they need. My dad left our family when I was 8. I don’t even know how to be a dad.”

“Well,” I commented, “you actually had to help your mom raise your brothers and sisters, didn’t you?” “Yeah.” “If I remember correctly, you even got an after-school job to help your mom with the household expenses, right?” “Uh huh,” Trey muttered, looking intently at the floor. “So I’m confused,” I softly said, “didn’t you learn how to be a dad when you were asked to grow up way to young?”

Our dating ideals, standards and preconceived notions can keep us safe, but they

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can also keep us single. There is no perfect person out there who checks all of our boxes! A healthy long-term relationship will always challenge us to move out of our comfort zones, learn new skills, and step (or be gently pushed!) into the next stages of our lives.

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