

How to avoid Disaster: Dating 101

by Kate Elliott, Divine Intervention

When people say dating is hard, it has to be the understatement of the century. Dating is complicated, awkward, flawed, and sometimes, a complete disaster. But remember this: it feels that way for everyone, no matter how much confidence one person exudes, deep down they're just as close to heading for the bathroom to phone a friend as you are. Whether you are 25 or 55, here are a few key things to keep in mind.

The first and most important aspect of dating is appearance. Studies say that the average first impression is solidified within the first two to ten seconds of an introduction. So besides the standard fresh breath and unmatted hair, choose wisely how you wish to present yourself. You're not going to your mother's house for dinner, nor are you going out with friends to prowling the bar scene, so keep it simple. For women- skirts, heels, flirty and feminine are always a must. Men still like feminine women on their arm and nothing says that like a great dress.

Often men take less pride in their appearance when it comes to dating. They come straight from work in a nice business suit, and when the time comes for a weekend date, he's in corduroys and a sweater that looks like something from an early 90s sitcom. Remember to update your non-work gear to include a nicely cut and current pair of jeans and jacket. Women love a man who looks good both in and out of the office.

Date location should not be taken lightly. If we wanted to go to a pub to watch a sporting event and crack peanuts under our heels, we'd call a male friend, or our dad. Be classy the first time around, and remember that proper lighting and audible conversation is a necessity.

Having one or two cocktails on a first date is completely acceptable. Getting hammered and not remembering whether or not your date drove you home is not. If the guy or girl you bring to the bar knows every waitress and bartender by name, this may or may not be a bad sign. Wait to make a fool out of yourself until you really know each other. And if drugs are what you are into, consider quitting or keeping it off the dating scene. You may attract the wrong kind of attention.

There are always the "obvious" dating tips that everyone should know, but nerves can take precedence over common sense. Be on time. Always be polite and courteous. An hour and a half is fine for a first date; don't marathon it with someone you hardly know. Stay off the cell phone; it may be the only thing to keep you company if you insist on always having it around.

While you are on the date be present and focused on the other person. Even if it's not a love match, be respectful because you never know when you'll run into that person again. Lastly, but certainly a veritable truth: honesty is the best policy. Just be yourself.