

## Highly Successful Dating for Highly Sensitive People

I'm guessing, if you're reading this, you might not have found lasting love yet. In fact, it's possible you've given up on dating altogether. For highly sensitive people like us, the search for love can be so full of confusion, and so overwhelming, it can end up not feeling worth it.

I was right where you are, and it sucked. I was confused, angry, and hurt. I didn't know if the problem was me, the people I'd dated, or the whole system of dating itself. I just knew I'd been trying my entire life to find a loving, reciprocal relationship with someone who actually made things better instead of worse, and the opposite kept happening.

After more than two decades of this, I finally had a breakthrough that changed everything and helped me find true love. We've been together for almost 5 years, and it's better than I could've imagined. I want to help you find love, too. Because no matter what you might be thinking right now, it isn't you, it isn't the people you've been dating, and it isn't the system that is failing you. It's simply a lack of information.

People can be available for all kinds of relationships, and yet not available for the kind of relationship you want and need. You get to determine what a great relationship will look and feel like to you, and then look (closely) before you leap. That was the breakthrough that led me to lasting love... I realized I could gather information about what would actually work for me, what would make me HAPPY, before getting emotionally attached. Sounds so simple, but it involves a lot more conscious thought that I'd put into relationships before!

I'm talking primarily about how you want someone to show up for you. How close do you want to be with your love? Do you need a lot of space, or a lot of togetherness to be happiest? How secure do you want to feel? Do you thrive with someone who responds immediately when you contact them? Do you want to be able to share your hopes and dreams and also fears and difficult emotions with someone who doesn't shy away from them, or disengage? Do you want to be with someone who expresses no doubts about their feelings for you, and the future they want to share together?

If happy, lasting love is your intention, you might want to consider all of these questions and any others that resonate with you. It pays to get really centered in your answers before you begin dating.

Beyond the quality and commitment you want in your relationship, what else would make your heart happy? To further uncover your desires, you might try going out on an imaginary first date.

The idea is to have dinner and a fun conversation between you and your ideal date. I recommend showing up as your best, most authentic self to this first date, the way you would when meeting anyone new. Bring along a journal to take notes.

Here are some questions to start the conversation. Ask them of yourself, and then pretend to be your date.

What do you like to do for fun?

What's your favorite food?

Do you like your job?

What are you passionate about?

What's your favorite thing about yourself?

Answer each of these questions (and any others you'd like to add) with honesty, compassion, and heaps of compliments for yourself. Ask your imaginary date the same questions and see what kind of answers pop up in your mind. You'll get great information about what you're looking for.

I did this just recently (because, why not?) and found that my imaginary date LOVED road trips. This was awesome information about what I was craving! I took that home to my love who promptly planned a little trip for us (yeah, he's the best).

Not only does time spent gathering intel on what will make you happy in a relationship give you crucial information you can take on real dates (and use in your future relationship!), it's also a way to connect with and show big love to yourself.

In my experience, any love you give yourself will amplify your ability to recognize love from another, and expand the love out there for you to receive. Get centered in the knowledge of what feels like love and then get ready to find it showing up all around you. Even if you've been feeling stranded in the dating desert.

### Attracting Dates \*Without\* Going Online

When you've spent some quality time with yourself and gotten centered in what you want and need to be happy in a relationship, there's a good chance you'll be feeling a glimmer of hope about dating again.

The first thing you might think is that you have to go online to meet anyone. And it's true, a huge pool of daters awaits you online, available virtually right this second. But diving in right

after a period of you-time can lead to a hot and cold love affair with dating itself. Especially for us highly sensitive daters.

If you're like me, online dating can feel like a roller coaster ride. It doesn't look so bad. But after one trip around you're thinking, what did I get myself into and when will this ride be over?! I can't tell you how many times I signed up online, had a date, and then immediately shut down my profile in overwhelm, resigning myself to the single life.

Fortunately, there are some fun ways you can step into the dating world, before you start going out 1:1. These steps will lead to a drastic increase in your chances of actually enjoying yourself (without nausea) if/when you finally do go online, and of finding better matches right in front of you.

Here are 5 things you can do right now, without having to go online. I suggest you try them in order; they get a little more interactive as you go:

1. Start conjuring up the feeling state you'd like to be in when you're out with someone. Would you like to feel calm but excited? Warm and fuzzy? Fascinated? Think of some activities that currently make you feel that way and do them as often as possible. Get into the feeling state you're hoping for and experience what it feels like, so you'll recognize it when you're dating.
2. As you go about your day, take note of any time someone of the sex that is romantically attractive to you smiled at you or did something nice for you. For example, someone opened a door for you, or let you go first getting on the bus. Get a little notebook journal going and at night write down every one of those moments you can remember from your day.
3. The next time one of these moments happens practice engaging, just a little bit. When someone does something nice for you, open your heart, smile, and say thank you. Practice being warm and open with a total stranger, without any pressure to engage further.
4. When you get comfortable with that you can take it another step and actually ask someone for assistance. Ask that hot guy at Target if he would get something down off a tall shelf for you. Ask the cute girl waiting in line at Starbucks what new drink you should try. Risk rejection in the smallest way that still feels a little scary. In your notebook write down how the person reacted, and how you felt. Be sure to give yourself credit for taking the risk, and give yourself a hug if the person didn't react in a way that made you feel amazing. (Although trust me, 9 times out of 10 they will).
5. Now you're ready to go to an event or a club where you know you'll be interacting with potential love mates (preferably somewhere singles go). I know everyone suggests this, and that's because it's a good step! Interacting without the pressure of the dating framework

can help you see what kind of emotions come up for you. Handling those emotions while you're still on your own will greatly increase your confidence. After the event get your journal out and write with the aim of exploring any disappointment or anxiety or other negative emotions that may have come up. Then take several deep breaths and tell yourself that it's all part of the process, and the right person will make you feel like a million bucks!

These simple actions may sound underwhelming, but for a lot of us they are just the right amount of stimulation when first getting back in the dating game. Consider taking these steps and you may even have dates lined up without ever having to put up a dating profile! Regardless, you'll no longer be on the sidelines. You'll have increased confidence, clear knowledge of how you want to feel, and a more open heart.

## Dating with Self-Confidence

What happens when you finally make a date?

Let's go out on a limb and say most of us feel nervous around dating, especially if we're out of practice. We've been fed all these ideas about how to act and look to be most attractive, yet also told to just be ourselves. We've heard so many conflicting perspectives on dating: Is it most important to try to be friends first? Or not waste our time on anyone we don't feel chemistry with? There can be a lot to navigate.

It's no wonder when we get into a dating situation we often find it incredibly difficult to sit with all of our thoughts and confusion and breathe, get present, and take in the person we're out with. But seeking to avoid our discomfort makes us prone to falling for anyone charming enough to put us at ease. It can also cause us to develop fantasies about someone we barely know.

Neither of these paths leads to self-confident dating. Self-confidence comes from being a discerning dater, rather than looking for someone who makes us feel good.

When you're discovering a new person, can you focus on your curiosity about them? About their character, what they want from dating and for their future, how giving and caring they are? Because I guarantee, if you are excited because you're having such a good time and you're NOT looking at these things, you're in the romance high.

When we're up in our heads the tendency is to make up stories about what is happening, based either on our fantasies of who we're dating, or on our insecurities about who we are. Getting present in our bodies is a great way to date with discernment.

Here are a few easy ways to get centered before and during your dates:

- Work-out before the date
- Meditate and breathe deeply for a few minutes right before you meet up
- Remind yourself often of the result you want from dating. Is it a reciprocal committed relationship? If so, getting centered with this intention before (and during!) your date will help keep you focused.
- If you (like me) have a tendency to drink alcohol to deal with social anxiety, consider coming up with a fun, fizzy, non-alcoholic beverage you could order instead of a drink. Even if you order a glass of wine afterwards, you'll have a chance to calm yourself at the beginning of the date and as a result, have much less tendency to over-drink.

The most important way to get centered, though, is to decide. Decide this will be the time you don't choose the excitement of romance over the peace of mind and well-being that come from staying present with yourself and your date.

We're all looking for someone to trust, and when you can trust yourself on a date you are setting the foundation for something wonderful, either with this person, or the right one just around the corner.

## Making Kick-Ass Dating Decisions

It often happens that we end up dating a multitude of potential suitors before finding one with whom we have a mutual attraction.

Before that happens, it can feel like one overwhelming decision after another. Should I say yes? Do I dare ask him out? I'm not sure how I feel – should I keep dating her? How do I keep from getting hurt or hurting someone??

Just the thought of making all these decisions can be enough to send highly sensitive people running. After all, we are fully aware there are fewer activities closer to the heart, fuller of potential regrets or painful feelings, than looking for love.

In the past, we may have run when things got confusing or overwhelming. I can't tell you how many times I got involved with a guy and then totally freaked out and broke things off in some kind of messy conversation, or just "ghosted" and disappeared. I'm not proud of this, but I recognize now it was the only way I knew how to free myself of the overwhelming stimulus and get grounded again.

The good news is there's a way to stay centered as you go forward dating. There are tools you can use to protect yourself from overwhelm that let you keep your heart open. Let's look at some of the awesome tools you can use for making confident decisions when you're dating.

The tools I'm suggesting all start with listening to your body. Your body will never lie to you. If you get comfortable listening to its signals and trusting its messages, your life will move forward in ways you never imagined. Exciting, and still manageable ways. Sounds good, right?

Here's how it works. Think of a decision you're currently unsure which way to go with. Take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Now imagine making the decision one way, and see how your body reacts.

Do you feel tense, like crying or a little sick? Or maybe you feel relieved, like your chest is expanding, even happiness? Take note of these feelings and sensations, however they show up for you. They are messages from your intuition.

Now take another deep breath and imagine making the opposite decision. Look at the contrast between how you felt before and how you feel now. Which reaction do you prefer?

For example, you've gone out with someone a couple times and are feeling super anxious. This is the perfect time to try the intuition tool. Make a decision in your mind and see what happens.

Let's say you try "Keep seeing him", and you get a tense, upset feeling. This is your body telling you no matter what your mind might be saying, something is off here. It's okay to receive this information fully without taking any immediate action. Just let your body's knowledge and intuition fully enter your mind. Then if you try "Don't see him any more" and feel a huge sense of relief, or breath expanding in your chest, you might want to consider letting this information lead you forward in the direction that feels best.

But maybe you try "Keep seeing him" and you get a happy expansive feeling! But your mind is still anxious. This is the perfect moment to get out your journal or talk to a coach and start exploring where the anxiety might be coming from. Perhaps it's your own fear of being hurt. Or it could be something as simple as not wanting to go out on "school" nights, or wanting to drink less alcohol. In this case, using your intuition can help move you in the best direction for self-care, without having to abandon the fledgling relationship!

These are a couple examples of the way emotions arise when we're dating and how checking our intuition can help guide us along the path. Sometimes (rarely) you won't get a strong reaction either way. This could mean one of two things. Either you are just getting to know your body sensations and might want to try yoga or walks, journaling or counseling to help you feel safe to listen into your body. Or it could mean you don't have enough information about the situation yet, and might want to keep inching forward and then check in again.

I can honestly say, without this tool I would not be happily engaged today. My fiancé is much (much!) younger than I am, and my mind had a million reasons why I shouldn't give him a chance. But I kept checking my intuition (to this day!) and I always get a great, big YES about him.

That's my wish for you, too... ease moving away from the wrong situations and a happy YES with the right person. All it takes is slowing down just enough to check in with your intuition, one small decision at a time.

## Starting Something Good

Keep practicing these tools for staying close to your heart and caring for yourself while you're dating, and someone really good is bound to show up.

Yay! All our worries are over! Ah, not so fast.

We all envision the beginning of a relationship as this super-romantic, head over heels, rose-colored honeymoon phase full of love and joy. And for many people that's the truth for the first few months or even years. But for highly sensitive people the early stages are often the most difficult part, where overwhelm is a constant companion.

We've wanted love for so long, but usually we've forgotten that developing a relationship means letting a whole other person enter our world, with all of their habits and smells and noises, the way they like to spend their time, their possible inability to replace the toilet paper roll. It means getting close to someone, and letting them get close to us. All of this translates as a whole LOT of extra stimulus.

Because we're so tuned in and perceptive it can be easy for us to get lost in this new, exciting relationship. It's so obvious to us what our new love wants and how they like to do things, and all we care to do is give them everything we've got, accommodate their lifestyle, and bask in the happy feelings.

You know what I'm going to say by now... No bueno! Well, not completely no bueno. Of course it feels wonderful to give to your new love and make them happy. We've just learned by now that our relationships with others thrive in direct proportion to how much we stay connected to and standing up for ourselves.

So as you're basking in the glow of your new person, consider checking in with yourself on a regular basis. Ask "what will make ME happy right now, apart from my new love?" And take some time to really listen.

Sometimes we may need to take a walk alone to reconnect. Sometimes we may discover we have questions for our new person, or there is a part of ourselves we haven't been ready or brave enough to share yet.

None of us knows the perfect time or way to have the real conversations that help create the rich, solid foundation for a relationship. The birth of a relationship is just as messy as any other birth. But we do the best we can. We speak up, we take time for ourselves, and we breathe. If the other person keeps participating, keeps investing, keeps coming toward us as we come toward them, then it's worth the awkwardness and vulnerability of saying what we need to say.

Choose to be a fully participating member of your new relationship. There is no way to guarantee your new love will be the one to last a lifetime, but by not abandoning yourself you guarantee yourself a lifetime of love.

And if it turns out this new romance doesn't have legs? Well now you've learned some tools and developed the self-confidence to let it go and keep on believing the right one is coming. You can take a little time and then get back out there, breathing, connecting to your intuition, and staying open for the best possible love to enter your life.

Never forget, if you lose your way or want some support, you've got me. I'm here to hold your hand while you look for a hand to hold. Dating is a lot for us highly sensitive peeps, but we often end up in the richest, most long-lasting loves.

Don't hide out on the sidelines thinking maybe it's too much for you. Your sweetheart will fit you perfectly. Just start by saying, "I'm willing." That's really all you have to do. xoxo

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**Jen Mallinger** is a trained Martha Beck Life Coach. A former boy chaser, hopeless romantic, survivor of the dating desert, and highly sensitive intimacy avoider, she is now happily engaged to the greatest guy ever. She loves to share her tips, insights, and listening skills with those looking for a little faith on their own mystifying and magical dating journeys.