

How to Avoid Falling in Love With a Jerk

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My husband and I have a favorite past time of watching the popular survival show, *Naked and Afraid*. It's ten shades of awesome. First of all, you get lots of survival tricks that could come in handy if ever finding yourself stranded for 30 days, in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but your one token item and a knapsack/satchel/purse looking thing to keep yourself alive with. Very entertaining. But mostly, we love weighing in on whether or not that particular episode's participant would last the entire 30 days or not, and if not, if their demise was due to violating the number one cardinal rule of legit survivalists...drinking water before purifying it.

This phenomenon always surprises us because each of these participants are self proclaimed survival experts, and as such, really should know that you NEVER ever drink unpurified water. But they do, almost every time, and usually suffer the consequence of severe vomiting and dysentery. Causing their already famished bodies to suffer that much more dehydration and malnutrition, consequently forcing them to either "tap out" or get pulled from the competition by the medics overseeing the experiment. **Why do it? Not a single one of them were unaware of this risk...yet they drank anyway.** They were just too thirsty.



In one of my undergraduate courses, we read [How to Avoid Falling in Love With a Jerk](#). In it Van Epp discusses the reasons why people find themselves stuck in relationships that are toxic, resembling nothing like the love they were hoping to find. Oftentimes, when the relationship ends and after the grieving period has finally passed, the individual is able to look back in retrospect and wonder, "What was I thinking? I must've been out of my mind! I knew better!"

However, like in the case of the survivalists who also knew better, an individual's situation and circumstances can change their survival needs and exacerbate the symptoms of that need, compelling them to go against everything they logically know. They simply can't help but drink from the unfiltered water. Individual's with a history of unmet needs in their childhood, insecurities, or trauma can quantify their desire to feel loved, accepted, wanted, and needed.

Causing them to either jump into a relationship way too fast, before the foundation of the relationship has been established, or with someone that doesn't treat them the way they know they should be treated. Logically, they know what they want and need in a relationship...however unresolved trauma causes them to throw caution to the wind and drink that unfiltered water.

Your ability to choose a healthy partner is greatly influenced by whether you are a healthy partner yourself. Ever heard of the term, "Love is blind"? When you have an exacerbated need, that's all you can see. You disregard blatant, evident red flags because the chance of potentially filling that need is literally blinding. Like a deer in the night, you can't take your eyes off those brilliantly bright lights, even at the expense of the semi truck that's about to leave you mangled on the side of the highway.

Get Healthy and Get Smart



It's an easy pitfall to believe that you can fix someone or that together, you can get your act together. This is a dangerous misconception that while there are always exceptions, oftentimes healthy individuals can turn unhealthy after being involved with someone less healthy for too long. Your main priority should be to get healthy yourself first and then entertain the idea of potential relationships. Clean your lenses before you go out looking! Once on solid ground, the appeal to enter a relationship with an unhealthy partner typically looks less and less appealing.

Recognizing Unhealthy Needs

When a need is repeatedly neglected it intensifies into a demand. If that demand remains unfulfilled, over time it continues to escalate and becomes absolutely necessary. Unhealthy emotional needs are healthy needs that are taken to extremes. Everyone has a healthy need to be loved, taken to the extreme becomes dependency. Everyone has a healthy need to serve and give, an unhealthy need to give can result in codependency. Trust is an important component of a healthy, intimate relationship, however trusting to the extreme can make someone naive, putting them in the position to be taken advantage of or manipulated--or even the extreme other side can cause the need to test trust, resulting in paranoia.

Acknowledging Common Relationship Patterns. Ie. Incarnation: Repetition Compulsion

Be aware that you are statistically more prone to recreating the dynamics of an unresolved relationship where your needs are not met and is a phenomenon that Sigmund Freud labeled as repetition compulsion. When the script from another story continues to play out, only with different characters, culminating in the same destructive ending.

Keep the Good, Redeem the Bad



Van Epp points out that there is very little about our past that doesn't influence the present, however so much of the future can still be redeemed. Change is absolutely possible but not without four essential ingredients:

Change Requires Insight Into Yourself!

The first step is acknowledging through self reflection. If the same patterns continue to emerge in your life, this may be an opportunity to look inward and ask yourself. What is it that you are doing or projecting that results in the same outcome? This is a hard step for anyone, however probably one of the most liberating as well.

New Information

Once you've had that "ah-ha!" moment and gain that insight through self reflection, new information is needed to direct the changes necessary to getting healthy. While most professionals in the real world recognize the importance of training and experience that prompt growth, when it comes to our personal lives, the idea of needing to be "taught how to get along well with others" can be downright insulting. Pay attention to your typical defense strategies. Learn what your "go to" tools of self defense are and reform them. Bake some good ole humble pie and look your shortcomings square in the eye.

Motivation and Time

Personal change takes time and intentional and concerted effort. These changes won't be easy for some and it will require the desire to truly change. These cannot be external and behavioral. You can't simply go through the motions temporarily in hopes of willing that special someone into staying. True change requires time.

So...How Thirsty are YOU?

If any of this article resonates a little too much truth, you may consider learning more. Dr. John Van Epp, author of *How to Avoid Falling In Love With a Jerk*, has also developed The PICK a Partner Program: *How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette)*. Also referred to as the PICK a Partner (or PICK for short--Premarital Interpersonal Knowledge and Skills). The website is www.lovethinks.com and can also be contacted at john@lovethinks.com for questions.