



Who's your love doctor?
By Anna David



You know the drill: You just got back from a first date and need to analyze it. A new guy you're seeing calls (or doesn't). You discover that your new beau cheated on his last girlfriend. What's the first thing you do? Call your friends, of course. When it comes to figuring out matters of the heart, most of us dial our best female friends to analyze them before we even develop our own opinions.

But Miss Best Friend's advice isn't always stellar. When someone is that close to you, she may not see things as clearly as someone who's less invested in your entire relationship past. And her own romantic situation may skew her viewpoint. (Think about it: If you've just been dumped, don't you sort of wish your friends would break up, too, so you could be single together?) Or, because she probably knows all your deepest insecurities and issues (that's a good thing) and will tiptoe around the cold truth if it will play on those (that isn't).

Who, then, should a lovelorn girl turn to for advice? We've got three substitute shrinks who can be counted on for solid relationship analysis.

Smart Sounding Board #1: Your frat-boyish male bud

"Ask men," says Tracy Richman, a Las Vegas-based dating coach. "They don't always give good dating advice to other guys, but they can really help us because they see relationships more clearly than women, who tend to get emotionally involved." So even though the most dude-like guy you know doesn't seem sensitive enough to offer advice, he can completely nail down what's going on. Guys know how *they* act when they really like a girl—and when they're jerking her around. A guy friend who's protective of you will have a super-sharp radar for how your new beau is behaving, and won't be worrying about "Is this too mean?" when he tells you the truth. Richman's one caveat: "Just make sure it's not someone who wants to date you himself." A guy who's hoping for you to be available will do whatever he can to torpedo your current relationship ("Oh, he called the next day? He *obviously* doesn't respect you.").

Smart Sounding Board #2: A not-so-close friend

Another option, according to Robin Gorman Newman, the founder of lovecoach.com and author of *How to Marry a Mensch*, is to survey people you don't know particularly well. We're not saying to grill your dental hygienist or launch into love talk with whomever is standing next to you at the copier. But a woman you get along with well at work or a college friend you only see every few months can actually be more insightful than the person you talk to three times a day. "It's really hard to get objective advice from someone close to you," Newman says. "A helpful third party can be great with letting you know, say, how you come across. Maybe you seem one way to your closest friends but send a different message to others, and the people closest to you won't pick up on that." Choose someone whom you've heard give good, no-nonsense advice in the past, and make plans to meet for coffee or grab some no-real-reason drinks after work. Mid-chat, steer things into new territory by casually saying, "Oh, let me ask what you think about something—I just started seeing this guy, and..."

Smart Sounding Board #3: A super-close relative

And then, of course, there's the woman who may well know you best of all—your mother. While her "Where are my grandchildren?" rants may categorize her as a last resort, she can be the best source of all. "Moms tend to have a good gauge of if someone's a good person or not," says April Masini, a syndicated advice columnist and author of *Think and Date Like a Man*. Having your mom involved makes it less likely that you'll delude yourself about something bad—you can rationalize away a guy's red flags with your friends, but when you lay them out for your mom, it's easier for you to be honest with yourself about his real potential. "And with your mom, you're not dealing with the kind of jealousy issues a friend might have," adds Masini. "You might even find out that your mom has dealt with the problem herself." So edit your sticky situation into a PG-rated version, and go ahead and see if mother always knows best.

Anna David is a Hollywood-based writer who covers sex and entertainment for magazines like Playboy, and Premiere.

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