

To find the love of your life, sometimes certain long-held beliefs are meant to be broken. Like these seven, for starters.

By Lisa Cericola

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When it comes to dating, everyone's an expert. Whether it's how to split the check (the man pays), make conversation (don't bring up marriage, kids, or your ex), or lean in for that first kiss (preferably in a doorway at the end of the night), we've all heard our share of solicited and unsolicited dating advice from co-workers, friends and overly friendly hairdressers. While these do's and don'ts are usually well-intentioned, they're not always true across the board—and sometimes, just sometimes, you've got to break a few rules to find what you're really looking for. Here's a round-up of conventional ideas about dating and advice from real dating experts on why reconsidering them can actually improve your love life.

Rule #1: Never date a co-worker

Obviously, there are plenty of good reasons to be cautious if you've fallen for someone you'll be running into every day at the office coffee pot. But unless your company handbook forbids relationships between employees, there's no reason why you should abandon any hope of romance. "Dating people you work with makes practical sense—after all, we spend so much of our lives in the

office, there's often no other way or time to meet anyone else," says dating expert April Masini, author of *Think & Date Like a Man*. Jennifer Nardella, 22, of Miami, FL, agrees completely. "My boyfriend and I met at a hospital we both worked at. I've always been against dating anyone at my job, so when he initially approached me, I wasn't interested," she says. "But over time, I realized how nice he was and we became friends. Eventually we started talking on the phone and seeing each other outside of work. Our relationship definitely added another level of pressure to my job, but we no longer work together now, and I'm so glad I made an exception to my rule and didn't pass up the chance to be with him when we did!"

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Rule #2: Always wait for the third (or fourth...or fifth) date to have sex

OK, so we've all heard a relationship is doomed if you sleep together too soon. But sometimes our feelings just get the best of us, and that doesn't necessarily mean it will amount to nothing more than a fling. Rather than sticking to some rigid, "no sex until date six" rule, trust your gut and enjoy the moment if it feels right for both of you. "While I was on vacation in Miami with my girlfriends, I met a great guy who was everything I'd been looking for," recalls Michelle Brown, 26, of Los Angeles, CA. "As the trip grew to an end, we shared a really romantic dinner and ended up going back to his hotel. I've never slept with anyone so soon after meeting them, but we were enjoying each other so much that I decided to just embrace the moment. Even though we lived in different cities, we traveled back and forth to visit each other for over a year afterward. Eventually the distance became too much of a barrier for anything serious to develop, but we're still great friends today. I've never regretted that wonderfully spontaneous night."

Rule #3: Rebound relationships never last

Give yourself time. they always sav. While it's healthv to mourn a relationship's passing.

Amongst these dating infractions, which one's most likely to make you stop seeing someone?

- Lying
- Bad manners (being late, taking calls at dinner, dressing poorly)
- Refusing to be exclusive
- None of these are a big deal

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that doesn't mean you should ignore anyone great you meet while you recoup. "Not all break-ups are the same," explains Brent Atkinson, Ph.D. of The Couples Clinic (www.thecouplesclinic.com), adding that some couples have mentally broken up months before things become official. "Instead of focusing on the timing of a new relationship, where you are emotionally after a breakup is a better indicator of whether a rebound relationship will work out." Case in point: "My rebound relationship has lasted four years!" says Debbie Fraser, 27, from Philadelphia. "My boyfriend Bill and I met while I was in a rocky relationship with my ex. The more we hung out, the more Bill made me realize how bad my current situation was. It wasn't long before my ex and I broke up. I was a little worried about jumping from one relationship to another, and I'll admit that things weren't smooth sailing in the beginning. My previous relationship left me feeling pretty emotionally damaged, and we had lots of issues to work through as a new couple. But with time, we got through our problems and couldn't be happier now. It really made me realize that you shouldn't pass up a good thing just because of timing."

Rule #4: Never date a friend's ex

Your friends' exes are usually off-limits when it comes to dating... but what if you felt a genuine connection with a friend's old flame? This scenario can create a delicate situation

for everyone involved, but according to Dennie Hughes, author of *Dateworthy*, there are ways to make it work. If you alert your pal to your feelings before acting on them, your

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friendship doesn't necessarily need to suffer. Daniel Smith, 30, of New York City, had such an experience.

"One night at a party, I started talking with a former girlfriend of one of my good friends," he says. "While I always found her attractive, I never even considered dating her because I always associated her with my friend. But now that she was single (and he had moved

on to someone else), she made it very clear that she was into me. When things started to look pretty promising, I decided to give my friend a call and fess up—and hopefully get his blessing. We'll both admit now that it was the shortest and most awkward conversation we've ever had, but he thanked me for letting him know and he didn't stand in our way."

Rule #5: Only date one person at a time

Every so often, the stars align, and several new prospects come along at one time. But contrary to popular wisdom, you don't have to settle for just one person. According to dating expert Dennie Hughes playing the field is the smartest way to find what you're really looking for. "All single people should dare to have spares," she explains. "Most people choose one person, commit to them, and then a few months later realize the relationship isn't working out so they have to start all over again. Save yourself the time by simply dating more people and staying in the game longer." Just be sure to be up front with everyone you're seeing, letting them know that you're in "dating mode" and not interested in getting exclusive yet, as Sean Divine, 25, from San Francisco, CA did with good results. "Ever since I started dating, I've been a serial monogamist," he says. "I always *thought* I was dating, but really I was just jumping from one long-term relationship to another. After my last breakup, I realized that if I'm going to find the right person I have to really see what my options are. So I started dating a number of people and found that it keeps things light and fun instead of getting too serious too fast. And it also gives me a chance to really figure out what I want in a mate. By not putting all of my eggs in one basket, I find that I'm able to judge people's character better and see what my type truly is."

Rule #6: Wait for your date to say "I love you" first

Saying the L-word for the first time is a huge turning point in any relationship, so it's no wonder why most people say you should wait for your partner to take the lead. But contrary to popular belief, Atkinson says there's no hard and fast rule for saying those three little words. "Sharing your feelings is courageous, and people tend to be attracted to others with a fearless, 'go-for-it' approach to life," he says. Instead of obsessing over whether or not to say it, Atkinson suggests just going for it. Ann Stout, 25, from New York City agrees. "My boyfriend Mark and I had only been dating for a few months when I surprised him by saying 'I love you,'" she says. "He was going away for the weekend and when I went to hug him goodbye, the words just came out before I realized what I was saying! Instead of saying it back, he just smiled and gave me a kiss. I could tell I had caught him completely off-guard, and I could feel myself blush. All weekend long I obsessed over it and why I had been so stupid to make the first move. But when he called me after he got back in town, to my surprise, he told me he had been thinking about what

I said all weekend and how happy it made him feel. Even though he wasn't ready to say it, he wanted to let me know that it didn't mean he cared any less for me. And when he did finally tell me he loved me, a few weeks later, it was an extra special moment because I knew he really meant it."

Rule #7: Couples who are in love spend all their free time together

One of the perks of being in a relationship is always having a standing date to do anything, from going dancing to washing your car. But that doesn't mean you and your partner have to be joined at the hip. Spending time apart is actually a secret of happy

couples, according to Hughes. "Things like your friends, career, hobbies and interests are what make you fascinating to a new date. Oftentimes, when couples settle down in a relationship they neglect the very things that made them interesting to each other in the first place," she explains. To keep things fresh, nurture your life outside of the relationship, even if it means giving up a date night now and then. "When I met Mr. Right, my social life completely and suddenly changed," says Ellen Collis, 25, of Louisville, KY. "I was so smitten that I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible. I started canceling long-standing dates with friends and as the months flew by, I realized I was completely losing touch with everyone but my boyfriend. After apologizing to all of my friends, I resolved to make plans at least one night a week without my boyfriend. The time spend apart gives us something new to talk about and made us appreciate the time we spend together even more!"

Lisa Cericola is a Brooklyn-based writer who has been published in Cosmopolitan and First for Women magazine. She's the self-proclaimed queen of rebound relationships.

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