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There's a nicer way to say no

By Judy Mandell

Neil Sedaka was wrong! Breaking up is no longer hard to do. With a click of the mouse, we can say no and move on to the next date — and open ourselves up to the possibility of a better relationship.

"The Internet, text messaging, email and BlackBerry [allow] you to readily say NO to someone without having to endure face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction," says Susan Newman, Ph.D., a social psychologist and the author of *The Book of No: 250 Ways to Say It—and Mean It and Stop People-Pleasing Forever*. "In a way, this is the easy way out, or an easier way out of a relationship that you don't want to pursue," says Newman. "As one young man told me, 'If she doesn't return my email in a reasonable amount of time or keeps sending excuses via Twitter or text message, I know to forget her.'"

Many of us view the word *no* as a negative — a perception that has been ingrained in us from childhood. We hate confrontations, and we don't want to hurt or offend anyone. The worry is that someone won't like us or will think of us as uncaring. Newman says it's better to have closure so both parties can move on.

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More and more people are breaking up electronically. It's quick. It's easy. It avoids direct confrontation and the exchange of feelings and emotions. But it's not always a good thing. "People are becoming less and less equipped to handle direct contact with one another — via telephone or face to face— beginning a relationship or ending one," says April Masini, author of *Think and Date Like a Man*. "For all of their benefits, text messaging and emailing are damaging our ability to relate to one another as human beings."

Nevertheless, when a relationship is new, it might be best to let people down easy via email. Erika Moore of RomanceLanguage.org agrees: "Writing allows you to thoughtfully consider your words and to be kind and tactful about saying no," she says. "Also, it avoids embarrassment and humiliation. The recipient doesn't have to put on a brave face or think of something face-saving to say."

Moore suggests crafting language that you feel good about, and then saving it for future use, should you need it. She likes some version of the following: "Thanks so much; I'm flattered, but my sense is that we're not a match. I wish you only the best."

Further, Moore says, "I don't recommend going into a whole song and dance about why you aren't a match, which typically results in a time-consuming and potentially hurtful back-and-forth."

Whenever she has done this for herself, it has worked out. "Either I didn't hear back from the person — leaving me to intuit that either it wasn't that big of a deal or he dealt with the disappointment privately — or I got a gracious email back, thanking me for my candor."

"Think through what you text, IM or email," Newman adds. "Be sure it says what you want. In longer relationships, the Internet is not necessarily the quick fix or the way to go. There's always room for misinterpretation."

Dr. Joseph Cilona, a psychologist in New York, offers these rules for a successful breakup:

Don't delay. If you're certain there is no spark or attraction, don't agree to having additional dates; end correspondence as soon as possible.

Wait before rejecting. Do not initiate communication with someone you don't want to see or talk with just to say thank you for a date. Thank the person while you are still on the date and do not initiate further communication with him or her if you're not interested in pursuing a relationship.

Be reasonable. If you have had a lot of in-person contact with someone, it's a good rule to end things in person. If you've only been on a few dates and most of your contact has been through technology, it's more acceptable to end things this way, and probably more comfortable for both of you. I like the "one breakup, one follow-up" rule for correspondence via technology. If the person continues to try to communicate after that, and you've made it clear that you don't have interest, it's more appropriate to just stop responding.

Be honest. Avoid saying things you don't mean (like "I enjoyed meeting you" or "I had a nice time" or "You seem like a great person") if you don't really feel that way. Many people can sense insincerity. Remain honest and keep it simple.

Be realistic. No one likes being rejected. Don't expect a positive reaction or be surprised by a negative or unseemly one. You really don't know the person, and you may not want to know him or her. Sometimes our instincts and intuition are in tune yet not quite in our awareness. If someone reacts inappropriately, do not engage that person. End communication immediately and don't respond to additional attempts to communicate with you.

Take cues. Many people who strive to treat others as they would like to be treated end up making avoidable blunders. Don't assume the person is like you and would want to be treated the way you would. Instead, pay attention and take your cues from what you have observed.

Listen and respond to whatever reaction you get. Focus on what you think the other person is feeling. Don't overly engage with the person; keep statements simple and resist the urge to console or apologize.

Judy Mandell is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in Ladies' Home Journal, Newsweek and USA Today, among others.



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