

ARE YOU DATING?

Older Adults and Healthy Relationships

Introduction

Dating should be a fun experience. It is a great way to meet new people, find someone to do things with and make great memories. There are many resources about dating for teens and young adults, however there is little information geared to older adults. Some questions about dating are the same for everyone, regardless of age, such as how to recognize and keep abuse out of the relationship. Older adults may also have other concerns. Even though you may have experience in relationships, it is always helpful to be aware of a few tips.

Did you know?

Many older adults are concerned about violence or abuse at the hands of a stranger. They worry about being robbed or home invasion. Very few seniors are harmed in this way. Most violence and abuse of older adults is by a loved one. Research studies show that older women and men are more likely to be physically abused by their spouse, or significant other, rather than by a stranger.

Tips for staying safe

There are many ways to meet that special someone, such as through friends, social events, or a blind date. Another popular way is through Internet dating sites. If you do not know the person you plan to date, be cautious about how much information you give out and where and when you meet him or her.

How can I protect myself when I go out with someone?

Here are a few tips on how to be safe when you start to date, especially someone that you do not already know.

- 1. Arrange to meet in a public place.** For your first meeting, arrange to meet your date at a public place where there will be other people close by, such as at a restaurant, a social club or cafe. Ask your date to join you on an outing with a group of people or go out with another couple or trusted friend. Be careful about inviting someone to meet you at your house. If things don't work out, you may not want that person to know where you live.
- 2. Take time to get to know each other.** Get to know your friend better. Ask lots of questions. If the other person won't answer all your questions, he or she may be trying to hide something.
- 3. Use your own transportation.** Arrange your own transportation to get to the date and don't offer to pick up the other person.

4. Be cautious if you are drinking. Alcohol can affect your judgment and lessen your inhibitions. Be as alert as possible on a first date with someone you have never met. Also, never leave your drink unattended.

5. Listen to your instincts. If something does not feel right, it probably is not. Call a friend or a family member and leave as soon as possible.

6. Always let someone know where you are going. Tell someone where you are going and who you'll be with. Check in with friends or family after the date.

7. Be cautious about giving out your contact information. Until you get to know the person better, do not give out your address or any information that would help someone find you. People can find where you live from your home phone number. If you want your date to call you again, use your cell phone number if you have one.

What should I know about safety if I use an Internet dating service?

There are dozens of Internet dating sites to choose from so ask some friends or family members about their experiences with such sites. Find out if the website has a strict privacy policy posted and make sure you understand it. Be sure the people you chat with cannot find out your name or where you live.

When creating your profile, do not use your real name or give your address, workplace, phone number, or any other information that could identify you. Be cautious about providing information on your hobbies, interests and your hometown as it could reveal your identity. Some people include a photograph, but many do not share a photo until they find someone they want to meet. Consider taking a computer course to learn more about the “dos” and “don'ts” of using the Internet. To find a course near you, contact your local community college or seniors' recreational centre.

Being in a healthy relationship

Healthy relationships are built on love, respect, caring and happiness. Some signs of a healthy and loving relationship include:

- Being valued and respected for who you are
- Being treated as an equal
- Being able to talk about your feelings without fear of your partner making fun of you or putting you down
- Taking responsibility for your own actions
- Not blaming the other person when things go wrong

If you are sexually active you should know how to protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STI). For more information about STIs go to HealthLink BC's website at www.healthlinkbc.ca and use the search term “STI”.

Keeping abuse out of your new relationship

You should feel happy and secure when you are in a dating relationship. If the person you are seeing is controlling, pushy or critical of you, it may make you feel uncomfortable, nervous and unhappy. If you feel like this, then you may be getting into an abusive relationship. When you are starting a new relationship, it is important to recognize the signs of an unhealthy and hurtful situation.

Some signs of an unhealthy relationship

Your partner:

- Gets jealous when you are around other people
- Destroys or threatens to destroy your things
- Hurts or threatens to hurt your pet
- Puts you down, calls you names, says you are stupid
- Blames you for everything that goes wrong
- Slaps you or pushes you around
- Tries to force you to have unwanted sex
- Tries to take control of your money, or pressures you to make a Power of Attorney or change your Will

This is not a complete list of all the signs of an unhealthy relationship. For more information about abuse of older adults, visit www.seniorsbc.ca/elderabuse.

Long Term Dating Relationships — Legal Considerations

Whether you have been dating for many years or you have decided to move in together, you may both have questions and concerns about how this might affect your legal rights and responsibilities.

When a couple lives together, it is called a common-law relationship. If you plan to move in together, you should talk to a lawyer to get legal advice about your rights and responsibilities.

For information about relationships, visit:

Living Together or Living Apart: Common-Law Relationships, Marriage, Separation, and Divorce

Legal Services Society

This publication explains the basics of family law in BC.
www.legalaid.bc.ca/publications/pub.php?pub=347

Your Income, Support and Property Rights

Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch

This telephone script explains your income, financial support and property rights when you are in or have left a relationship that is not a spousal relationship. Call Dial-A-Law at 1 800 565-5297 to listen to script 148, or to read the text, visit:
www.cba.org/bc/public_media/family/148.aspx

Getting Help if Things Go Wrong

If the situation is an emergency or if a person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

BC Centre for Elder Advocacy & Support — Seniors Abuse & Information Line (SAIL)

604 437-1940 | 1 866 437-1940 (toll free)

Available Mon-Fri, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Starting July 2013, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily (excluding holidays). SAIL is a safe place for older adults, and those who care about them, to talk to someone about situations where they feel they are being abused or mistreated, or to receive information about elder abuse prevention: www.bcceas.ca

VictimLink BC is a toll free, confidential and multilingual telephone service available across BC and the Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1 800 563-0808. It provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence. VictimLink BC is TTY accessible. Call TTY at 604 875-0885.

For information about domestic violence, where to get help, and staying safe, visit www.domesticviolencebc.ca or the **Provincial Office of Domestic Violence** website at: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/podv/index.htm

We are pleased to acknowledge that this pamphlet has been adapted with permission from a publication produced by the Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick.