

## Dating 101

### Building confidence and a positive state of mind

The time between when people first begin thinking of approaching someone they are attracted to and when they actually take that step is often filled with questions, self-doubt, fears about being rejected, and other concerns. Rather than ruminating about insecurities and anxieties, this time can be used to build skills and self-confidence. In this article, I will discuss skills related to a building confidence and a positive state of mind, including being mindful of mood states, anxiety reduction, and nonverbal communication. A subsequent article (to be published in the next edition) will address skills related to engaging in a conversation, namely introductions, using ice-breakers, keeping the conversation going, and concluding with suggesting a date.

When people are in a good mood, their outlook on life and themselves is colored by positive emotions and thoughts. Good mood helps us smile more readily, talk more spontaneously, and feel more self-confident. It is these very characteristics that we want to project when approaching someone we like. Because mood has a range of shades, and knowing how we feel may not be always evident to us, it may take some learning and practice to readily discern our mood. Becoming mindful of our mood requires no more than taking a few minutes several times a day to check in with ourselves and be present to our thoughts and emotions. Ideally, it will be when we are in a good mood rather than in a neutral or bad mood that we will take the step toward approaching the person we like.

If we were to rank situations that induce a high degree of anxiety, approaching a person in whom one is romantically interested would rank fairly high. Although anxiety can be useful when experienced in moderate degrees, excessive anxiety undermines our interpersonal skills in a number of ways. First, very high levels of anxiety hinder our ability to focus on the other person and what s/he is saying. We may then, unwittingly, give the impression that we are not interested in the other person. Second, our own thought processes tend to be less clear and less organized under significant anxiety, giving us less control over what we want to say and how we say it.

The practice of relaxation exercises has much to offer in reducing anxiety. Whether one uses breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness exercises, or meditation, the effect on the body and the mind tends to be similarly calming. See the list of relaxation exercises under “Relax your Mind and Body.” Finding a relaxation exercise that is a good fit and engaging in the exercise before approaching a potential romantic interest is likely to improve the interaction because it will make you feel and come across as calmer, more centered, and spontaneous.

In face-to-face conversation, what we express in the language of our body is as important as the words we use. In body language we communicate our mood, feelings, and attitudes, and show to others our level of interest in them as people and in what they have to say to us. Our body language, including posture, eye-contact, and smile, is another way to connect with the other person, both as we are speaking and as we are quietly

listening. Positive or open body language involves having a relaxed, and yet upright posture with arms unfolded rather than folded and leaning forward slightly as the other person is talking. Similarly, engaging in eye contact conveys that we are present and interested in our conversational partner. People vary in their comfort level with different intensities of eye contact. Intermittent eye contact, during which there are periods of looking in the eyes, periods of looking at the other facial features (especially the lips), and brief periods of looking away is quite appropriate and likely to feel natural. Finally, smiling as we look at other people is one of the most effective ways to convey liking of people, and to project a warm and pleasant attitude.

Another article on Dating 101 will appear in the next edition.