

How to succeed

Ever wondered why some people breeze through life while others stagger from crisis to disaster? It's nothing to do with luck – as our expert guide reveals

Love

It's the drug. It's all around. It's all you need – so how come no one teaches us how to do love properly? It isn't on the curriculum and you don't have to pass a test before taking your heart on the sometimes bumpy road of life. Fortunately, though, some people reckon they can read the map...

How to find it

"We've stopped believing in love at first sight," says clinical psychologist Dr Steve Holmes. "But actually it's what we're genetically programmed for. We're meant to roam the Earth, spot a member of the opposite sex and if something 'clicks' for both parties, that instant mutual attraction will generally ensure a strong, uncomplicated and lifelong bond."

Of course, not everyone is lucky enough to spot their soul mate in a bus queue. For most of us, finding Mr or Mrs Right involves that trial by embarrassment known as dating. And first of all comes the first date.

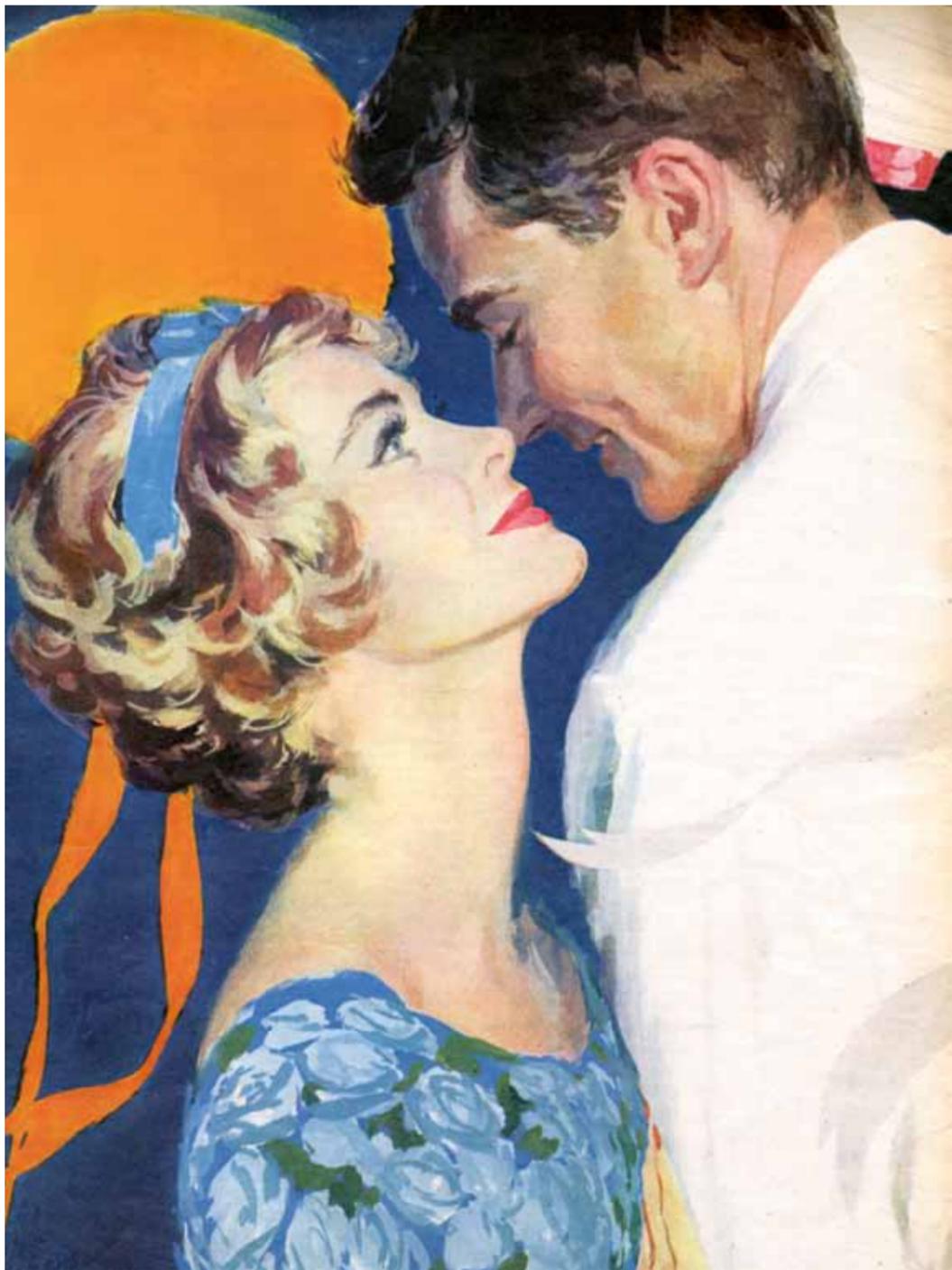
"The best way to approach these is as a massive opportunity, so you get a thrill out of picking your clothes and carefully applying your make-up," says psychologist and dating coach Jo Hemmings. But if you're in the larger group who would frankly rather be somewhere – anywhere – else, "insist on a one-hour time limit," adds Jo. "Then you either leave with both of you wanting more – which is good – or you can stick it out, knowing the end is in sight."

In today's world, anyone looking for love simply has to go online – but just being there isn't enough, says dating coach Mary Balfour. "You need a damn good profile, where you don't come across as needy or desperate," she says. "Then date as many people as possible who meet your criteria. Just don't sleep with any of them – it'll cloud your judgment – until you're ready to take yourself off the market."

But don't be too fussy either. While that click of instant attraction is vital, don't approach your date as an exercise in box-ticking. "People ask themselves, 'Will he look after me? Will we get on well? Will my parents approve?'" says Dr Holmes. "But that's not love – that's compatibility. Ask couples who've been together decades how they met and you'll be surprised how often the phrase 'it was love at first sight' emerges."

How to make it last

Most relationship counsellors agree that two things are key to longevity in love: physical contact and meaningful communication. Relationships author



Tracey Cox says, "Sex, when it's working, counts for about a quarter of the success of your relationship. But when it's not, it can poison everything else."

So how do you keep the spark? "Have sex with your partner but close your eyes and imagine it's someone else," says Tracey. "You're not being unfaithful and you don't need to tell them – you're just tricking your brain into thinking everything's new again."

When it comes to communication, keeping that early magic alive is also the key to lasting love. "Find time each day to sit down and talk," says relationships counsellor Susan Quilliam. "Get used to sharing your thoughts, hopes and feelings with the person you love – just like you did when you first met." And deliberately make your relationship a priority, adds her colleague Val Simpson: "Don't let it slip below doing the washing or taking the bins out on your daily to-do list." All of which – happily – will do wonders for your sex life, too.

Pocket problem-solver

"Our sex life has lost its sparkle"

● You're both busy, you're both tired, so making love drifts to the edge of your priorities. The trouble is, our bodies eventually forget the passion we're capable of as a couple. So remind them. Find five minutes each day to be sexual – whether that's a lingering kiss or a full-on fondle. It doesn't have to lead to sex, but it will remind your body of what it's like to feel desired and desirable.

"We never talk any more"

● This is another habit that couples get out of. So start practising again. Sit down together at the end of each day and talk on a deeper level than who's doing the school run. Remember how you used to share every hope and dream?

"Is this it?"

● This is when he buys a Harley-Davidson and she gets a tummy tuck. The kids have left home, you're suddenly feeling old and life seems meaningless. You're unhappy and you blame your relationship – which is a classic mistake. Remind each other that it's only your circumstances that are getting you down. Make time to talk and renegotiate your relationship so it works for this new, different and potentially exciting phase of your life.

WORDS: RACHEL HALLIWELL, KATE BAILY AND RUBY MILLINGTON / IMAGES: ADVERTISING ARCHIVES

Family

"Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," wrote Tolstoy. Actually, that's precisely the wrong way round. The causes of most family miseries are relatively few – and so are the mistakes we make in dealing with them. Which means it's not that hard to do much better.

Happy children

If you're looking for a mother's mantra, you could do worse than "just say no". "Children need boundaries – and consistency," says therapist Cate



Campbell. "Otherwise your kids will find more and more extreme ways to test their boundaries. Being consistent with rules, punishments and rewards makes children feel safe, and it makes your life so much easier."

It's also good to back off from time to time. "If you try to do everything for your child, you are preventing them from feeling proud of their achievements," says child psychologist Dr Amanda Gummer. "Neither are you letting them learn from their mistakes, which can actually lead to a lack of confidence and depression in adulthood." She suggests letting children take age-appropriate risks, such as walking to school by themselves, and encouraging them to be responsible for their own pocket money and belongings.

If you think these guidelines sound a little harsh, show your love by giving that most precious of all commodities: time. Family expert Anne Denny suggests each child should get a minimum of 15 minutes' undivided one-to-one attention every day. Children who receive that, she says, are less likely to seek attention through being naughty.

Happy families

We make a lot of assumptions in our close relationships, and we routinely expect others to read our minds. Therein lies the root of so much trouble. "Get off autopilot and *listen* to what other family members are telling you," says family psychotherapist Tim Martin. "Then try to be clear about your needs and expectations in return. Everyone in a family has a need to have their ideas

heard and validated, so set time aside to discuss and problem-solve together. If you are angry, walk away and calm down before things escalate, and set time aside to sort the problem out later."

Sibling rivalry is another cause of much family strife, but often we are fighting old battles with hatchets we should have buried years ago. "We tend to assume that our brothers and sisters are the same as when we were children," says Cate Campbell. "But we should try to see and accept them as they are now, because people change."

Day-to-day squabbles should be resolved within the family, but when really big problems come along it's crucial that we feel able to ask for help. Schools and GPs are good first points of contact, and there are many help lines and support groups out there. Don't be afraid to get extra support.

Finally, remember to laugh. We can all take things too seriously as children, parents and siblings push our buttons. But it's OK to make mistakes, so try to laugh often – especially at yourself.

Happy endings

When parents become elderly and infirm, it's vital that our relationships are in good working order because the conversations we need to have can be emotional for all concerned. "The most important things to remember," says ageing specialist Dr Lynda Shaw, "are respect and kindness." When someone is old and ill, they are still an individual with the same rights as you have. Any plans you make for their care must have their consent, which is why it's always good to have that tricky

conversation earlier rather than later. “Research your options and call a family meeting,” says Dr Shaw. “Everyone should be involved in the decision – especially the old person concerned.”

Pocket problem-solver

“My children are constantly fighting and it’s driving me mad”

● Wherever possible, try to let them sort it out between themselves. Help them to understand each other’s point of view but let the small things go – don’t go wading in every five minutes to sort out squabbles. Make sure you praise both children for their efforts, treat them as individuals and try to be fair.

“My house is a tip and I’m fed up of clearing up after everyone”

● Ask your children to clear up behind themselves and tidy their own bedrooms. Make life easier for yourself by not trying to be Kim and Aggie – that’s just for TV. When children are older, create a list of tasks to share, perhaps with increased pocket money as a reward.

“My mother-in-law/older sister is always interfering and criticising my parenting”

● Giving overbearing relatives a defined role can work wonders. Ask for help with specific tasks such as taking the children to the park after school, and seek advice even if you don’t need it. Then they will feel included so they’re less likely to force themselves on you.



Career

It used to be so simple: you studied, you qualified and you worked 45 years for a single employer then they rewarded you with regular promotions and a nice fat pension. For today’s workforce, that now seems as quaint and outdated as fax machines and luncheon vouchers. But although the modern workplace is less secure, there is also a whole new world of opportunity out there, whatever your age...

How to get started

“Nowadays degrees are 10 a penny,” says HR director Harry Dunlevy. “Good qualifications are still the price of entry to the jobs market but they aren’t enough. You may have the grades but someone else will have the grades *and* the X factor.”

The best way to convince a potential employer that you have what it takes is, of course, to show them. “Companies now view internships as a vital part of the selection process,” says Ollie Sidwell, co-founder of www.ratemyplacement.co.uk. “And we’ve found that 60 per cent of placement and internship students will be retained by the company when they graduate.”

How to stay ahead

“Never stop learning,” says Ann Francke, chief executive officer of the Chartered Management

Institute. “Explore ways to become better – putting your hand up for opportunities, networking, gaining professional qualifications. Keep developing yourself and embracing change, because it’s not going away.”

The biggest change in all our working lives has been the digital revolution, and not embracing this simply isn’t an option. “I recently looked at the LinkedIn profile of a former colleague,” admits one sales supervisor who took time out to raise a family. “I was horrified to realise that not only did I not have the skills she mentioned, I also didn’t even know what they were. I felt so out of the loop, it seemed impossible to ever get back in.”

It isn’t, of course. Everyone around you hasn’t suddenly become a genius, and professional websites such as LinkedIn are designed to be easy to use. “Embrace the potential for self-promotion that new technology offers,” says Harry Dunlevy. “There’s no point in people not knowing about you. You have to be out there, raising your profile.”

But tech skills aren’t enough. “For certain roles, you can get by on technical expertise, but people with passion, energy and drive just stand out,” adds Dunlevy.

“We try to help people unlock what they’re passionate about,” adds Steve White-Cooper, founder of the HR agency Add-Victor. “And when they do, it’s a light-bulb moment. Most people have a passion – the trick is to make yours pay.”

Pocket problem-solver

“How can I write a knockout CV?”

● “Limit yourself to two pages and start with a brief profile summary,” says Kate Gerald of graduate recruitment specialist Grad Central. “Then list your employment history, qualifications and any unusual extracurricular activities (not the gym and the pub). Don’t leave gaps – say so if you’ve been travelling – and never lie. You’ll always get found out.”

“The person next to me earns more for doing the same job”

● “Most HR people are happy to have this conversation if approached in the right way,” says Karen Meager from Monkey Puzzle Training & Consultancy. “Don’t be confrontational – simply say you’re curious about the differential. Let them suggest how you can help yourself up into that pay bracket, so it becomes a personal-development discussion, not a complaint.”

“I’ve been promoted over a senior colleague who now hates me. How do I manage him?”

● “Are you just assuming he resents you?” asks Meager. “If so, you’ll treat him differently, which may cause a problem that wasn’t there in the first place. If his resentment is clear, address the issue early rather than wait, because it won’t get better by itself.”