

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SHIDDUCH DATING

What You're Reading

Welcome to the Practical Guide to Dating. Think of this as your friendly paper dating coach.

All too often, young people find themselves in the shidduch parsha without quite realizing the intensity of the interpersonal skills, communication skills and level-headedness it requires. They are thrown in with a few good tips on the do's and don'ts and left scratching their heads on how to find their way around. If this was your experience, this guide is meant for you.

On the other hand, there are many singles who have been dating for a while, and nothing seems to go. They can't seem to get past a second or third date and they can't imagine bringing the relationship to a deeper level. If this is your experience, this guide is meant for you too.

After years of personal experience in shidduchim, in addition to coaching others, this guide comes to address a key component of the date that impacts all types of daters at any stage: the conversation.

It's geared for both men and women and for anyone who wants to learn a few tips on the inner workings of how to have meaningful conversations. Reading this manual should give you the skills to make your dating more effective, and yourself (or someone you know) calmer and more confident. If you are not a single in shidduchim, chances are you know someone who is. Feel free to pass it along to them! Here are all the fundamental tools you need to craft effective conversation that builds a relationship, which is what the conversation is all about.

A quick note: The organization of this guide follows the dating process. Shidduch dating is goal-oriented, so each stage is addressed with a clear goal. However, instead of referring to each date as "Date one," and "Date Two" we will use the term "Stages." Since every dating situation is different, it would be impossible to emphatically state what to expect from each date. The idea is to insert your date into the appropriate stage and use it as a reference point.

With Hashem's help, may your career in shidduchim be short and sweet and may you merit to build a beautiful bayis ne'eman b'yisrael.

Before We Begin

Here are a few preliminary concepts that I'd like to share before we dive into the details.

1. Following Rules- Use Your Common Sense

Dating comes with a lot of rules. For example:

- A hat, tie and jacket must be worn on the first and second date.
- The first and second dates are "lounge dates," then you need to do something fun to see each other's playful side.
- The boy must open the car door for the girl.

And so on. A lot of rules. Which sometimes cause a lot of questions. Do you open the car door both getting in and out of the car? Do you continue to do this for every single date? Can you do a jacket without a tie? What about no jacket? What if you forgot to open the car door? What if you want to bring up some hashkafa on the second date? Or even the first (gasp)?

Here's the bottom line: The rules are there to help you navigate shidduchim, but not to control your every move. Therefore, **the most important rule of all is: Use Your Common Sense.** Which leads us to concept number two.

2. Trust Yourself

Like we said, the rules are there to help. They help give you a framework of what to expect and when to expect it, which can significantly smooth the dating process. However, you are certainly allowed (and should be encouraged) to use the rules as your starting point and use common sense the rest of the way. For example, definitely do come to the first date in a beautiful outfit, nice makeup, and heels. But heels for date number two? Well, that depends. Do you like wearing heels? Then by all means. Is he shorter than expected? Then perhaps flats will do better. Use common sense and feel confident to make your own decisions. That's concept number two: **Trust Yourself.**

Some people may think this is a radical statement. There are certainly times when a mentor or a dating coach are helpful and even necessary. However, singles in shidduchim are also adults and are mature enough to make decisions and trust their decisions in many areas, not only

shidduchim. If something doesn't (or does) feel right to you, trust your intuition. Yes, you may need to talk it out with a third party, but when your intuition tells you something, listen.

3. Come Prepared

This concept is a basic and fundamental aspect of dating (that I have learned not to take for granted!)

Prepare for dates beforehand. (We'll go into more detail of *what* to prepare for each date later on.)

How do you prepare for a date?

Before the date, think of about three to five topics to discuss (the more the better, if possible) and jot down short notes for each one on a little piece of paper. Sometimes just one word is enough to remember the topic, and sometimes a bit more is helpful. Put the paper in your pocket in case you need a quick reminder. Often, just writing it down puts those topics at the forefront of your mind. You may not need to look at it at all.

Another method is to discuss your conversation topics before the date with someone whom you feel comfortable to use as a sounding board. Bottom line, make the time to prepare. It can be five minutes or twenty minutes, but if you put in more time preparing you will see a difference in the date. And as a bonus, being prepared puts you in a confident and positive frame of mind. What better way to come into the date, right?

So in short, my three basic preliminaries to dating are:

1. Use your Common Sense
2. Trust Yourself
3. Come Prepared

Stage One¹

Goal: The goal of stage one is to get to stage two.

Really. The beginning dates simply establish if you are comfortable with his/her appearance and general personality. This can last anywhere from dates 1 - 2, to 1 - 4. That's basically it. Don't go in expecting much more. (Much easier said than done. I know. But try to push away thoughts of "can I marry this person?" when you've been in their presence for only twenty-three minutes.)

➤ **Conversation Fundamentals: Understanding the Difference Between "Personal" and "Vulnerable."**

Grasping this concept is the foundation not only for successful dating conversations, but successful communication in many areas of life. Understanding the difference between what we'll call "Personal" information and "Vulnerable" information can help make your beginning dates more natural and meaningful, and later dates progress further. Here's the idea:

Personal Information is information about yourself that shapes who you are, that you feel confident and comfortable about, and that you aren't sensitive about. This can include everything from your tastes in food and music, your hashkafos, your best friends, your dream job, and your talents and interests.

Vulnerable Information is information about yourself that you feel private about, that you share with good friends and family, but that you don't feel comfortable sharing with acquaintances. This is not necessarily a big, dark secret. It is simply aspects of yourself that you are somewhat sensitive about and would only share with people who you trust and who wouldn't judge you. It can include personality likes or dislikes, family background, particular memories, etc.

These categories are entirely subjective. For some people, something might be personal information, while for others, it is vulnerable information. For example, I know someone who has a great

¹ I was originally going to use this footnote to describe why I am referring to this first date as "Stage One" instead of "Date One," but then I decided to put that in the introduction. However, I really like the look of footnotes. They make any document look professional. I think I'll keep this one in.

singing voice. He often sings in public and feels confident about his talent. For him, this talent is personal information. He has a brother who also has a strong singing voice but is unsure about his talent and never sings in public. Perhaps he is shy or feels that his sibling outshines him in this area. There could be a myriad of reasons, but in this case, this talent would fall into “Vulnerable Information.”

So that’s the gist. Each person needs to identify their “Personal Information” zone and “Vulnerable Information” zone. Once you do, you can prepare topics of conversation that fall into the appropriate categories at the right time.

The first two dates (and possibly more,) are definitely “No vulnerable information” zones. However, by bringing up *Personal Information*, your beginning dates will have a lot more depth and will get you a lot farther than talking about Israel and the weather.

➤ Conversation Tips

1. The Basic Conversational Formula:

1) State what happened 2) Then say what you thought or felt about it. Example: 1) What happened: For Shabbos Chanukah, my whole family got together in my brother’s house because he has the most space. 2) How you felt about it: It was a little crowded and I don’t love squishing, but it was really nice having the whole family together, so it was worth it.

What does this accomplish? It turns statements of facts into a conversation, it brings “personal information” into the discussion, it gives the other party a glimpse into the workings of the real “you,” within the context of your day- to- day life. In short, it gives life and depth to your conversation. Use this formula!! You can also use it to find out more about the other person. If they have just shared an experience that happened to them, but kept it pretty surface-level, you can respond by asking them how they felt about it. If you feel too stiff asking, “how did you feel about that?”, you can say things like:

- “Wow, that’s a crazy story. Were you nervous? Scared? Excited?”
- “I can’t imagine what I would have done, how did you handle it?” etc.

2. Background Info

Shidduchim can put you in an awkward position. You’ve never met this person before, and yet because of doing research, you know quite a bit

about them. Some people will pretend they never saw your resume (sometimes this is actually true,) and just ask the basic bio questions straight out.

- “So, how many siblings do you have?”
- “Which seminary did you go to?”
- “What’s your name again?” (That one is a joke. I hope.)

While this approach is fine, there is really nothing wrong with acknowledging that you do know something about the person you are on a date with. In fact, it shows a level of consideration on your part; you are prepared, you know the basics and you are interested in finding out more.

Here are some alternative ways you can bring up biographical topics:

- “So, you went to BYA seminary, did I get that right? Where is it located again?”- (This can also lead into a discussion about the different neighborhoods you have visited in Israel.)
- “How does it feel being a middle child? Do you have two, or three siblings above you?”
- “Where did you go before BMG, was it R’ Dovid? How many years were you there?”

The trick is to take the information that you already know and add on a question to find out more. This way you acknowledge what you know and use it to further the conversation.

3. Jewish Geography

As ordinary as it sounds, Jewish Geography is a great dating tool. Bring up commonalities that you have. For instance, if your sister went to the same seminary as your date, mention that. If your brother went to camp with his brother, mention that. This helps you feel like you are not two strangers, but that there is some connection between you two, even if just peripherally.

➤ Conversation Topic Ideas

1. FISH- (Friends and Family, Israel, Siblings, Hobbies)
2. Current events in your personal life (best place to start!), music likes/dislikes, food likes/dislikes, vacation preferences, favorite Yom Tov, upcoming family events, past family events, job stories,

dorm stories, your funny experience ordering glasses online, car troubles, what you like and don't like about your commute, your favorite speakers on Torah Anytime.

Stage Two

Goal: The goal of Stage Two is to gain one or two additional insights into the likes or dislikes of the other person.

In other words, getting to know them slightly better than just first date pleasantries. Preparation for Stage Two dates is very similar to Stage One.

➤ Conversation Tips

1. **Follow up:** Reference the first date conversation. This shows that you were paying attention. You remember what the other person said, and you thought about it. For example, if she mentioned an upcoming work meeting that she was nervous about, ask her how the meeting went. If it's the beginning of the zman and he just got new chavrusos, ask him how it's working out.
2. **Dive Deeper-** Think about specific things the other party brought up on the first date and what you would like to know more about. Prepare questions to ask him/her that take the topic to the next level. You can bring it up like this, "Last time you mentioned... have you ever thought about...?" For example: "Last time you mentioned that you made a sheva brachos for your friend. Do you like doing that sort of thing in general? Would you want to do it again?"
3. **Additional Personal Topics-** Bring up more "Personal Information" about yourself that you didn't talk about on the first date.

➤ Conversation Topic Ideas

1. Eating out vs. eating in, what you really want for a Chanukah present, Do you have a smartphone, filtered/not-filtered, What you originally wanted to go for in college vs. what you are doing now, Why you like the winter/spring/summer/fall best, the time you actually won a Chinese auction prize, Why you are interested in kiruv, why you think it's important to take vacations, how to establish a keshet with a rebbe/teacher, why it's hard to establish a keshet with a rebbe/teacher.

Stage Three

Goal: Establish a level of comfort to begin to bridge “Personal” and “Vulnerable.”

Stage Three (which can correspond to the third date but does not have to) is like a bridge, a transition time. A lot of people like to do some sort of fun activity to get to see another side of the person. The goal is to shift from feeling like strangers to a more “we know each other” feeling. This happens when the conversation gets a bit deeper, and slightly more personal, alongside the fun (or after the fun part.)

Otherwise, it’s possible for stage three dates to turn out as “second dates again,” without any forward momentum. This can lead to one or both parties feeling frustrated or confused about the potential for the shidduch. (Don’t worry- this is normal, but it can be helped along with good preparation.)

Keep in mind that even if a stage three date did not result in any DMCs (deep meaningful conversations,) it is still worthwhile, since spending more time with another person naturally makes you feel more comfortable with them. So, if the “Second Date Again Syndrome” happens to you, remember that it’s a common phenomenon and it does have value in the dating process.

➤ **Conversation Tips**

How can you make stage three dates impactful? **By allowing yourself to be yourself.** You are trying to create a level of comfort that will allow you to share a vulnerability. Bring up more personal topics to help this along. Ask yourself if you come home feeling comfortable with how the other person reacted and interacted in the environment you were in. If you are starting (note, starting!) to feel comfortable simply being with the other person, the conversation is flowing more smoothly, you can be lighthearted, and you feel confident sharing your opinions, then you are ready for the transition stage.

➤ **After the Third Date- When to continue, and when to end it.**

Here’s a rule someone shared with me that I found very helpful. **For the first three (or four) dates, you need to have a reason to say no.** If you don’t have a good reason to say no, go out again. Even if you’re

not feeling it, if things are matching up and it's going okay, give it at least three dates. **After the third (or fourth) date, you need to have a reason to say yes.** Things might match up, but if you're not feeling it and don't really have any interest in going out again, then you need a good reason to say yes to another date at this point. Otherwise, it's okay to say no, and trust your instinct that it just wasn't the right one.

Sometimes (actually, often), it's hard for an individual to verbalize what she/he is feeling. In hindsight and with a little distance, it's easier to pinpoint the reason why someone was not for you. And sometimes it becomes very clear (but not always.) Following this rule allows you to give the shidduch a fair chance and creates a framework for when to end the shidduch respectfully.

➤ **Communicating with the Shadchan**

A quick note on communicating with the shadchan. And that is, communicate! I've learned this the hard way. Sometimes you're just not sure what to answer, or you're trying to get through to your rebbe or teacher for guidance and they aren't answering the phone, and then the shadchan calls! Help! The best approach is not to avoid the shadchan, but just to be honest. Tell the shadchan you simply don't have an answer yet, but you are trying to reach your mentor and you will be in touch as soon as possible. Unless it is a super pushy shadchan... then refer to preliminary number one.

Stage Four

Goal: Share a vulnerability.

At this point, you are no longer strangers. Even though there is still a lot you don't know about each other, you should feel a certain sense of familiarity. Being comfortable to share a vulnerable part of yourself is a big step in bringing the shidduch to the next level.

➤ **Conversation Tips**

1. Test out Vulnerable Information

Prepare one or two things that reflect a deeper part of who you are which you would like to share. For example, think about your personal goals in learning. Think about how you always envisioned your future home. Think about your struggles and accomplishments. Then bring up

this topic on the date keeping in mind that it's normal to be nervous and unsure how the other person will respond. After the date, evaluate your comfort level during this conversation and it should offer you a sense of how you feel about the shidduch.

2. Vulnerable Doesn't Mean Bad

Some people think they need to share their deepest secrets or worst mistakes to be more personal with the other party. Perhaps the thought behind this is "if the other person knows my bad side and is okay with it, then that means they'll accept me for who I am." This is not a good idea. In fact, some things never have to be shared at all! Don't think that if you aren't sharing something, it means you aren't being open with him or her. There are many ways to share deep, personal things without focusing on negative things. Additionally, keep in mind that you are still very much at the beginning of a relationship where everything you say and do is overprocessed by the other party.

If you want to share something negative that you are working on improving, here is a good formula to use:

1. Begin by saying your goal. 2. Then say what you are doing to get there.

For example, there was a fellow who had a hard time learning but was very dedicated. It took him a long time to understand the material. He was dating a bright girl from BJJ and wanted to share this challenge, but it was very personal, and he didn't want to come across as unintelligent. Instead of just stating the facts, he started by saying, "I'd really like to get to a place in my learning where I can understand the Gemara right away. Right now, I've been putting in hours and hours, sometimes even after seder, to get to the bottom of it. It's a lot of effort, but I'm hoping it will pay off down the line." (Reaction: Wow! You are so dedicated. You have so much patience and stamina to sit and work something out!)

This is totally the opposite of just sharing the negative side of where you are now. It also shows that you are a growing person. In this way you can reverse a potentially negative thing into a positive one.

3. Little Gifts

Stage four can also be an opportunity to bring a little gift for the other party. Cookies, chocolate, a CD he said he liked. It shows you were thinking about her/him after the last date, and you put in a little effort to make them smile.

Stage Five

Goal: Break The “Fourth Wall.”

“Breaking the fourth wall” is a stage term referring to when an actor speaks directly to the audience. The concept is that the fourth “wall” - the one between the audience and the actor, is torn down. (The other three walls are the sides and back of the stage.)

I like to apply this concept to dating when you get to that point where you wish you could be more natural and get a glimpse behind the “dating walls” that people instinctively put up. You just want to know what the other person is really thinking and feeling about the shidduch.

Breaking the fourth wall takes a lot of courage, but it almost always needs to happen to bring the shidduch to the next level. (Note, the date on which you are ready for this depends on each situation. It can be the fifth date, the sixth, or the fourth, etc.)

➤ Conversation Tips

1. How to break the fourth wall

Step one:

Make sure you are both ready and want the shidduch to progress. Don’t assume your date is ready for these deeply personal discussions just because you are. The best way to find this out is by discussing it with the shadchan. You can simply ask, “Where is he/she holding?” You can also ask the other party directly at the end of the previous date if you feel comfortable doing so.

Step Two:

Once this has been established, you need to bring up one or two (or more) serious topics in a way that you feel comfortable. Here are some ideas:

- Ask the shadchan to tell the other party to prepare a list of personal questions they would like to ask you. You will also prepare a list. You can specify what type or how many, or you can just leave it open and see what happens. On the date, once you have settled down, you can bring it up by asking, “I prepared some questions for you. Are you okay if I bring them up now? I would be happy to answer your questions as well.” Or “I’d love to hear if you have any questions for me. Would you like to talk them over?” Etc.
- Use conversation games such as Perfect Matches. Go through the question cards beforehand (cheating tip) and put all the ones you want to discuss at the top of the pile.
- You can also just wait for a quieter moment in the date, perhaps on the drive home, or a walk outside, to simply bring up some topics you want to talk about.

Whichever way you go, the best way to do it is to dive right in and be honest. You can say, “I have some things I was thinking over and wanted to discuss with you. Is it okay if I bring them up now?” The most important thing is that you allow yourself to shed your “dating wall” so that you can have an honest, frank discussion.

Here’s an example. A couple was dating and things were going well, however the girl felt there was something holding her date back from moving things along. She asked the shadchan where he was holding and was told, “I’m pretty sure he’s only going in one direction.” But she needed a clearer answer than that. She felt like the “fourth wall” was still up and had a sinking suspicion that the reason was a lack of physical attraction. She prepared a mini speech for him about this topic (“moonbeams are for Hollywood” and the like) and was determined to bring it up on the next date. When the moment came and she felt the time was right, she plucked up the courage and said, “Can I ask you honestly where you feel this is headed?” His hesitant response: “You want me to just say things straight out?” “Yes!! Yes, yes, yes! Please just be totally honest!” (Success! The wall was broken.)

They went on to discuss some things that had been bothering him, which turned out to be completely unrelated to her original suspicions, and the two felt they took a big step forward.

2. Compliments

You may not have felt comfortable giving a compliment until now but at this point, it's a good idea to tell the other person something you like about them or are impressed with. You can say "I'm so impressed with how you handle stress/ with how you speak about your family/ That was really perceptive/thoughtful/kindhearted of you," etc.

Stage Six and On

Goal: Continue building trust, share vulnerabilities, and discuss future plans.

As you progress in a shidduch, you will want to feel that each date has brought you a step ahead. Obviously, there is no perfect formula for how many dates you need. The general goal remains to keep the dates progressing until you are both at the point where you feel ready to commit to this relationship and get engaged.

Be aware that setbacks are normal, pareve dates are normal, and pareve dates after you've had a major breakthrough date, are also normal. So, let's talk about how to keep the dates progressing to the best of your ability. And also, how to identify what *isn't* normal.

➤ Conversation Tips

1. Building trust

The more you feel that you can trust the other person, the more the relationship can really progress. The best way to do this is by continuing to share little pieces of personal and vulnerable information and evaluating the conversation afterwards. How did you feel before sharing it? Did you want to share it, but were nervous or scared? Did you feel pressured to share? How did the other party respond? When you feel comfortable sharing a certain level of vulnerabilities, it means you trust that the other party will handle the information delicately and respond sensitively. Even if right now you aren't super comfortable, if you feel that the potential is there for trust to build, that is also a good sign.

2. Discuss Future Plans

Discussing the future is important in a technical sense and helps you both come to the reality that your future plans may include each other. In the beginning, you may want to bring up future plans in a more general way, since it is usually a pretty big deal to jump from “I” to “we.” Start with discussing how you envision certain things about your future home (this can happen even earlier on in the dating,) such as the atmosphere, parenting approach, internet and videos, spending habits, etc. By around date number 6, you can make the jump to “we” by asking questions to the other party regarding these things. You can phrase it like, “I’ve always imagined that I would do/say/go/ here, what do you think of that?” “What do you think of such and such approach to xyz?” It is understood that there is a “we” involved here. You are leaving an opening for things to possibly change from how you originally imagined them based on the response.

3. Important Preferences

There are certain things that are recommended to discuss during dating that you shouldn’t take for granted or assume will just fall into place. These things include:

- How you each handle money
- Where you see yourself hashkafically, now and in the future
- How you would like to raise your children

These are all topics that are important to discuss once you are farther along in the dating process. It will establish certain expectations for the roles you will each play in this relationship, in addition to getting along and enjoying each other’s company.

4. Reference Previous Tips

Most of the previous tips mentioned in this manual can be applied to any of the dates. Try them out and see what works best for you.

➤ Identifying Red Flags:

Red flags are a big catchword in shidduchim. Almost every couple that I know had some sort of “red flag” come up during the dating that sent them on an emotional roller coaster before it was resolved. A smart way to deal with red flags that I heard from a well-known dating coach

is identifying if the issue is a red flag, or a stumbling block. The concept is that a red flag means “Stop,” and a stumbling block means “How can I step around this?”

How to identify the difference between a red flag and a stumbling block:

a. Discuss it with a Mentor

Sometimes it can really help getting the opinion of a third party, non-judgmental person whose opinion you trust. If you have someone you can discuss your dating with, bring up the issue and ask their opinion. The trouble is that not everyone has this kind of relationship in their back pocket and finding a dating mentor on the fly is rather challenging. But if you do know someone you can ask, take advantage of their wisdom and experience, and don't be worried that you are bothering them. People are almost always happy and willing to help, especially if it means helping a shidduch move along.

b. Use Your Common Sense

If you don't have a mentor (and even if you do,) you can still use your common sense and intuition in a lot of cases. Try to analyze the situation logically by asking yourself the following questions:

1. Is this issue one that affects the person I am dating, or just the family?
2. If it only affects the family, how do I imagine it will impact me when I am around them?
3. Is this issue a universally accepted concern, or am I personally just unfamiliar with it?
4. Is this issue something I am personally comfortable with, or can see myself becoming comfortable with?
5. Is this issue something that will affect how well he/she can be a good wife/mother or husband/father?

Keep in mind that you aren't going to change the other person or the situation and hoping that it will change on its own is not the smartest way to deal with it. Some issues that come up are not things that common sense alone can help you navigate. You may need to find out more information by contacting additional references and doing more research, but you can still use your common sense and personal judgement to help you decide what to do with the information or advice you are getting.

Here are some examples I know of personally.

One party shared that they were seeing a therapist. This shook up the other party and they were not sure what to do about it. Although everything else about the person was healthy and normal, this came as a surprise, and they wanted to discuss it with a dating coach. The first person they asked was someone well-known but not someone they knew personally. The response was that this was a very serious thing and should not be taken lightly. If the shidduch was going to continue, they should be very, very cautious. The individual still felt unsure about it, since they felt the coach had not asked detailed questions. They went to a Rav they trusted and the Rav's response was very different. In this situation, seeing a therapist was a reflection of healthy self-awareness, the other party was handling their situation responsibly, and there was no reason not to continue, considering all other factors were falling into place. They continued dating and today they are married.

Another situation came up when a boy mentioned on a date that when he gets together with friends, he enjoys having a drink. In his mind, he didn't think much of it because it was common for guys to get together and have a beer. The girl was very concerned when she heard this though, because she was not familiar with it and because it suggested serious drinking issues. She looked into it more and based on further information, she felt reassured that it was not a case of an alcohol problem and was within the realm of normal.

In short, when you are faced with a potential red flag, first ask yourself if this is a stop sign or a stumbling block. If you are not sure, discuss it with a mentor or ask yourself the above questions. Daven that Hashem send you clarity. Use your common sense to assess the situation and make a decision that feels right to you.

The Final Stage- Tying the Knot

Hooray! You're finally at the point where you are ready to get engaged! ... Or are you? You may feel ready but perhaps you aren't sure if the other person is ready. Here are some tips to navigate the final stage of dating.

1. When is the right time to get engaged?

There is no definite answer to how many dates you need before getting engaged. Each shidduch is unique and each needs a different amount of time to go through the dating process. However, most couples will progress through the stages discussed in this guide before being ready to tie the knot. By reviewing the list of stages, you can assess if you're at the point of making a commitment:

- 1) You are physically attracted to the other person, and you feel comfortable in their presence.
- 2) You respect their likes and dislikes.
- 3) You have shared personal thoughts and feelings, and you feel comfortable sharing more.
- 4) You've shared vulnerable thoughts and feelings, and you trust that they will handle the information delicately and keep it private.
- 5) You've discussed future plans together and you are both on the same page.

If all these points align, then you are probably ready to get engaged. More dating might make you more comfortable with each other but might not be necessary simply because it takes years to achieve a truly deep level of closeness.

2. How do you know when it's the right one?

The big question! You are not the first or last to wonder, "How do I KNOW??" Again, think back to how you progressed through the stages of dating. Do you feel comfortable with the other person, and enjoy your conversations with him/her? Do you see eye to eye on important topics and have you investigated any potential issues? If you answer positively to all these, then be assured that Hashem is showing you that this is a very good idea.

What if you answer positively, but there's one catch- you don't like them! There seem to be no issues at all except for the fact that you don't seem to feel attracted to the other person in that way. In this case, I personally feel (generally speaking!) that there is usually something else going on that isn't matching up for you and you just haven't pinpointed it yet. The trick is that this is a very delicate area. Some people feel a lot of attraction before getting engaged and some people feel less and go ahead with a more logical approach. In my opinion, there needs to be some level of "tshukah," attraction, toward

each other to get engaged. If everything truly is falling into place, but you are just not “feeling it”, you need to determine why and if that reason is something you should pay heed to or dismiss. If you can figure this out on your own without second guessing yourself, great. If not, this is probably a good time to discuss the situation with a mentor.

3. Preparing for the big day

If you are ready to get engaged but not sure whether to bring it up directly with the one you are dating, discuss it with the shadchan or a neutral third party, who can find out what the other side is feeling. Some people like to have one, or a few more, relaxed dates where you both know you are going to get engaged. This allows you to just enjoy each other’s company without any question marks hanging in the air, and also gives you the opportunity to discuss any loose ends. One nice idea during this time is to draw family trees on paper that you can swap, giving the other person a head start on meeting your family. When planning the proposal date, it is best to discuss the day and time beforehand. Some people like the idea of “popping the question”. While it sounds exciting and romantic, I believe most people would prefer to be prepared for the big day. You can also discuss details of how you would like the proposal to take place. Some people like something splashier, while others prefer to be low-key. Better to discuss it in advance so that you’ll both feel calm and ready for this special moment.

Tips for the proposal:

Write a list of all the positive things you appreciate about the other person. Think back to your dates and write down examples of things he/she said and did that show these positive traits. Then incorporate this list in a card/letter/poem/short story. You can either hand it to the other person or read it out loud before giving it them. Example: “Your kindness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, amazing middos, sense of humor, smarts, amazing derech eretz, kibbud av v’eim, etc. shine through each time you...” Any personal touch you can add will be very appreciated by the other party.

It’s also a good idea to do the proposal earlier on in the date so that you both have time to enjoy the moment together. You’ll appreciate the moments of privacy because your phones are about to start ringing! Good luck!

Signing Off

I hope this guide was helpful and informative for you and gives you the self-assurance to date with confidence. I'd like to end off by mentioning one last skill to develop while dating, and truly the most important one. This skill is your Emunah. All the tools and skills in the guide are wonderful but they are part of the package on the hishtadlus side. Since it's our responsibility to do our best, why not educate ourselves on the key components that can help us put our best foot forward. At the same time, honing the Emunah skill reminds us that ultimately our lives, shidduchim included, are in Hashem's Hands alone. Who you will go out with, how many people you will date, all this is part of the plan that is tailor-made for you- and this should be a comfort. Just do your part responsibly and you can be confident with your choices knowing that Hashem is absolutely taking care of you.

Wishing you a smooth, easy and successful shidduch parshah.

For more information or additional
copies, please reach out to
practicaldatingcoach@gmail.com.

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