

Dating: It's Not Just for Kids Anymore

February is the "month of love," heralded in by Valentine's Day, sappy love poems, romantic cards, candy, and a multitude of other "love"-inspired marketing schemes. Although it has become indefinitely commercialized, this month does induce many individuals to focus on the love in their life, whether it is their spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or the desire of future love. The avidity to have that romantic love leads some people to seek it out by joining internet dating sites, chat rooms, frequenting bars, or joining the church choir.

Dating has great potential to be fun and exciting, and should be viewed as an essential time of getting to know someone on a deeper level. When one thinks of dating, the immediate thought turns to teenagers and young adults just beginning a new phase in life. However, there are many singles out there who are 30+, looking for that very special person with whom to share their life. Not a lot is mentioned about this group in terms of dating. It is becoming far more common for men and women to wait until their 30s to get married and begin a family. It is important to remember this group and the special circumstances they may be dealing with as they search for their significant love.

Many singles in the middle and later years may have already experienced some sort of expressive relationship. Perhaps they are divorced, have experienced the death of a spouse, or have dealt with the demise of a long-term relationship. For these, re-entering the dating scene can be a frightening time. There are a few thoughts to keep in mind when counseling a single adult about dating issues.

Remind them to listen to their heart. Often a more mature person will over-think things and talk themselves out of a potentially good relationship. In the same way, they may talk themselves into something their heart knows is wrong.

The advice of family and friends is essential. What they have to say may not always be welcome, but trusted "outsiders" have the ability to see potential red flags that may otherwise be missed. Ultimately, it is the individual's decision whom they will date, but it is always a good idea to consider the counsel of those closest to them.

There is no substitute for time. Adults who fall in love are more likely than their younger counterparts to rush into engagement and marriage. The rule of thumb is that couples should experience every season together before marriage. Literally, this saying suggests that a couple should date for at least one year. However, it also has a figurative meaning, in that it is important to allow the relationship to move past the infatuation "season" and endure some conflict in order to establish a deeper love.

Screen time does not equal face time. While online dating services and other social networking sites are valid ways to start relationships, it is important that at least part of the couple's dating experiences be face-to-face. If they do not live in the same area, it is advisable to live apart but in the same city during an engagement period rather than marrying immediately upon re-locating.

Prayer and trust in Christ is the most essential element. Counsel singles about the importance of listening to Jesus and following his will. Remind them that he has promised them prosperity, hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

These tips are not unique to older singles in the dating world, rather they are reminders of lessons once learned and since forgotten. It is important to remind older singles of these things in a way with which they can identify. Older singles have the challenge of time, time that seems to creep up quickly, mentally and spiritually aging them and tearing down their last bits of hope. It is in that promise that God spoke; that we can renew that hope and help people generate lasting relationships.

Written by Lisa Hernandez, LPC

