

Mid-Life Dating With Less Anxiety

from the American Counseling Association

When we think of dating, it's usually teens and twenty-somethings that come to mind. But today, more people than ever over the age of thirty are finding themselves in the dating pool and facing new and different stresses related to dating later in life.

Whether it's career-based decisions to wait on marriage, or a divorce that has left one single, mid-life dating is now much more common. And it can be stressful if only because it may seem that there's a lot more riding on it. At twenty we assume that there's an almost endless world of relationship possibilities and opportunities. At forty we realize that options are usually more limited.

Dating at mid-life can also produce stress because it can easily upset an established life. You have a career, friends, regular routines and activities that bring you comfort and, hopefully, joy. Then, suddenly, a new romantic interest is affecting a lot of those established things.

Maintaining your normal life rather than turning it totally upside down for that someone new and special is one way to limit stress. When you cancel plans and scrap your regular schedule for this new person, you're sending a message about how little you value things already in your life. Instead, rather than stressing over a scheduling conflict, just admit you're not available and suggest another time that works better.

You also don't want to lose existing friends. A new relationship can carry the temptation to focus only on that person, but eventually that can leave you feeling guilty and anxious over how you've ignored, and possibly lost, old and trusted friends. A better approach is to respect your friendships and look for ways to integrate your new romantic interest into those friendships.

Remind yourself, as you begin dating relationships as a mature person, that you already have a full life. A new romance shouldn't force you to shut down your existing life and make building this new relationship your only focus. That's a sure way to increase anxiety and to set yourself up for an emotional crash if things don't work out.

Instead, view mid-life dating as an enjoyable, interesting adventure that's an addition to your existing life, not replacement for what you already have. Resist seeing dating as an "all or nothing" proposition and it will be much less stressful...and more fun, too.

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