

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Facing The Challenge Of Mid-Life Dating

from the American Counseling Association

Dating isn't something just for young people. While dating is a chance for the parents of teens to worry, and a chance for twenty-somethings to find a serious relationship, today there's a whole new age group, those 30 and over, who have found themselves in the dating pool.

They can be there for a variety of reasons. Perhaps career-based decisions meant having to wait on marriage. Maybe there's been a divorce or the passing of a spouse. Whatever the reason, it can be a stressful situation because it may seem as though there's a lot more riding on dating. In our twenties there seemed an almost endless world of relationship possibilities, but as we age we realize that the options are usually more limited.

Dating at an older age can also produce stress because it usually upsets your established life. You have a career, friends, regular routines and activities that bring you comfort, but suddenly a new romantic interest will be taking up your time and affecting many of those established relationships.

So how can you reduce the stress? Start by maintaining your normal life rather than turning it upside down for this new person. When everything is canceled for someone new and special, it sends a message about how little you value the things already in your life. Instead, rather than stressing over a scheduling conflict, simply admit you're not available and suggest another time that works better.

It's also important not to lose existing friends. When you focus solely on that someone new, you'll end up feeling guilty and anxious over how you've ignored, and possibly lost, old and trusted friends. Instead of cutting off those friends, look for ways to integrate your new romantic interest into those friendships.

Another key to reducing the stress of mid-life dating is to remind yourself that you're a mature person with a full life. A new romance shouldn't force you to shut down your existing life and focus only on the new relationship. Doing so is 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 a replacement for what you already have. Don't look at dating as an "all or nothing" proposition and it will be much less stressful and more enjoyable.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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