

Prepare yourself for... summer loving



If you wanted your holiday romance to last, but let it go, perhaps you need to identify your love-brake – the factor stopping you falling in love. “Often, we don’t fall for a man, because subconsciously we stop ourselves,” says Cate Mackenzie†, leader of the Open Your Heart workshop. We’ve spoken to top relationship experts and uncovered the four most common love-brakes. See if the statements in each section apply to you, then read on to break free from your fears.

1 “I don’t want a boyfriend”

- I've never said 'I love you' first to a boyfriend.
- The last man I lusted over wasn't available – maybe he was already in a relationship or didn't feel the same way as I did.
- I cringe when people are affectionate in public.
- When I start dating, the thrill of the chase is the most exciting part.

If you agree with two or more of the statements, read on for the tips and advice that follows. If not, skip to the next section.

LOVE-BRAKE: YOUR FEAR OF COMMITMENT. You may exude a who-needs-a-man attitude, but are you scared of being tied down? “Many of us fear a relationship means losing control because we have to share our life with another,” explains Mackenzie.

Imagine you’re in a building with five floors, advises Alex Gardner, a relationship and social psychology professor. On the rooftop is intimacy, where great relationships lie. But you must get the

lift past the other floors to reach the top. “The first floor is ‘withdrawal’, where you spot someone,” explains Gardner. “Next comes ‘ritual’, where you speak. After that ‘pastimes’, where you talk about your interests, then ‘games’, where you’re together, but testing how much you like each other. Finally comes ‘intimacy’, where relationships intensify.”

ACCELERATE Practise getting off at the ‘ritual’ level. Once you’re happy with that, you’ll find it easier to be intimate. “Smile at someone, to open yourself up to emotional links,” says Gardner.

A relationship is yours to design. “Everyone’s commitment levels are different,” says Mackenzie. “If seeing each other once a week works, do that.”

“Go to a singles night, but focus on making female friends, not meeting men,” says dating expert Lorraine Adams††. “Afterwards, meet up and discuss how your dating is going. Bonding with like-minded people will make you realise you’re not alone.”

GO TO
NEXT
BOX

2 "My last boyfriend put me off love"

I find it a turn-off if a man says something I disagree with.

Sex is best when I am in love with someone.

I don't envy my parents' relationship at all.

I feel more comfortable making friends with women than men.

If you agreed with two or more of these statements, read on.

LOVE-BRAKE: YOUR PAST IS HOLDING YOU BACK. "Memories of previous relationships can put on your love-brake without you even knowing it," says Mackenzie. "Maybe your parents divorced when you were young and that's affected the way you think. Or your ex wouldn't commit and now you worry you demanded too much of him. Admitting you have baggage is the first step to clearing it."

Gardner agrees, "When we think about an upcoming situation, we play out imaginary film scenes in our heads. Each frame anticipates what will happen next, based on our personal experiences

in the past. Resolve to be your own director and change the ending of the film."

ACCELERATE AGAIN Make an inventory of your relationships, to identify issues hanging over from them. "Write the man's name, then write down how he made you feel during the bad times," says Mackenzie. Add the negative man-mantras you use, such as 'All men cheat.' "Identify which ex made you think that. You'll probably see it was one man, not a general rule for all men." Next, think of an event that gives you an anti-love feeling and draw up a SWOT (strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats) diagram. For example, if your ex cheated: the strength could be 'I'm not in a bad relationship now'; the weakness 'It affected my confidence'; the opportunity 'I can now meet someone new', and the threat 'I'll never meet anyone'. Focus on the strengths and opportunities. "You'll see how defeatist the threats are on paper," says Gardner. "Stop your past acting as a love-brake on the present."

GO TO
NEXT
BOX

4 "I'm too picky to find a man"

I have a clear checklist of what I want in a man.

My number one bugbear is when plans change unexpectedly.

I've cancelled seeing a friend because I had to work late in the last two weeks.

At school, I took the subjects I was good at – getting the best grades was more important than trying something new.

If you agree with two or more of the statements, read on.

LOVE-BRAKE: YOUR HIGH EXPECTATIONS. "We feel we can have the best of everything, from our jobs to our social lives to the men we meet," says Adams. "But by saying: 'I only date tall blonds', you're putting your love-brake on."

Often, work becomes a stock-exchange for not having time for a relationship. "It's natural to hide in your job," says Mackenzie. "But you can't call in sick from a relationship. If you're independent, with a good job, and everything in your life is in place, you may love being in control and see relationships as messy."

ACCELERATE AGAIN Adams suggests dating men who don't fulfil your requirements, to broaden your horizons. "Challenge the beliefs you hold about who the perfect man is. We often surprise ourselves – Sarah Michelle Gellar admits she wasn't romantically attracted to her husband Freddie Prinze Jr. at first."

Gardner says you can view this as increasing your 'emotional equity'. "When you have a house, you spend money on it to increase its value or equity. You have to put the same amount of upkeep into your relationships. If you're miserly with your feelings, you won't get the payback you deserve," Mackenzie agrees. "If you work hard, realise how much energy you throw into your job and learn to shift that energy into having a relationship, too."

GO TO
NEXT
BOX

3 "I have my friends for support"

I can't remember the last time I had a night in on my own.

I prefer men to make the first move.

I hate it when people play games with me.

Any man I date must get on with my friends.

If you agreed with two or more of these statements, read on.

LOVE-BRAKE: YOUR CURRENT FRIENDSHIP GROUP. "The bond we have with our friends is one of the strongest in life," says Mackenzie. "Yet sometimes they stop us being open to a relationship."

"It's easy to think you're getting all the emotional support you need from your friends and not admit you want more from a man," says Gardner. "After all, it's a safe option – you don't worry they'll fall out of love with you. Also, we all play roles in life and our character changes, depending on who we're acting with," says Gardner. "If

you're stuck in a role with your friends – as 'the one who is unlucky with men' – you'll start to believe that's who you are."

ACCELERATE AGAIN "If you always go out with the same group, see them in smaller combinations to stop yourself being stereotyped," suggests Gardner. "Meet two or three of them for a drink and talk through your relationship hopes. Next time you're back in the group and someone teases you, they'll see you differently and speak up."

"Remember, you've got brilliant friends who love you, so you have the capacity to fall in love," says Mackenzie. "Write an emotional CV for each of your friends, bullet-pointing their qualities. This helps you draw out your own CV – you share many of their personality traits, which is why you get on so well. The next time you meet a man you like, remember your emotional CV. That will give you the confidence to push things forward."