



8 Relationship Red Flags

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I once was talking to a guy who told me he was going to learn how to “pick up chicks” by going to a pickup artist to learn the techniques to do this. About a year or two later, on a radio breakfast show, the presenters had come across him and wanted to test him with some listeners to see if he was successful. (If you feel a bit sick now just reading this; me too.) Fortunately, the listeners didn’t fall for anything. In fact, they laughed at some of his attempts and saw through all the showmanship. But sometimes that doesn’t happen. Particularly if you are young, have little experience with relationships, and have had some unhappy and toxic relationships in the past, you may not be able to recognise the signs and quickly end up being hooked by someone who is not good for you.

Below are some strategies that people may employ to get you into a relationship with them which are red flags you want to watch out for. Men and women can engage in this behaviour, and it may also be in friendships and with work colleagues, not just romantic relationships.

1. **Negging.** You probably know this method even if you have not heard of the name. Someone engaging in negging is someone who puts you down, criticises you constantly, berates you for never doing enough or being enough. In other words, they slowly chip away at your self-esteem, so you consider yourself lucky to be with someone like them. And because they have gotten you to feel worthless, you don’t believe anyone else would ever want you. If all someone does is put you down and make you feel inadequate, you want to get out. And yes, you are worth better and you will find better.
2. **Bait and switch.** Here they check how easy you are to control. Do you comply completely with whatever they want. They bait you by talking about what they want and seeing if you will do it. They can also bait you by changing dates all the time and seeing if you will always go along with what they suggest. Now be careful here because in building relationships you do want someone who will pay attention to what you love doing and surprise you every now and again. But if every single conversation is a test to see if you will comply with whatever they want, then you want out.
3. **Testing your empathy.** People who are highly empathetic can often fall for manipulators who will spend most of your time together telling you stories to get you to feel sorry for them. They will tell you how badly all their exes treated them. How cruel the people in their lives have been. How truly horrible all their past relationships have been. And they will repeat the stories often at great length. They want you to feel sorry for them so they can get away with

treating you however they want to. They play on people who may want to heal them or take away their pain. People who want to show that they are not like all those cruel exes. Beware of someone who blames others for everything wrong in their lives. An adult has to take some responsibility for the state of their life.

4. **Trying to provoke jealousy.** Here a person tries to bring in another person, create love triangles, or tries to make you jealous by talking about a third person. They figure that by talking about another person you will get jealous and in wanting to keep them will do anything they want. Because there might be another person in the picture, you will go above and beyond for them. This strategy does work with some people. Personally, I have had someone try this and as someone who doesn't get jealous of others it doesn't work. I have no wish to be someone else other than myself, and I have no desire to have the life of anyone else except my own. If you keep bringing someone else up, then go off and you two can be together.
5. **Keeping things confusing.** This covers many things, but it is usually about little and dishonest communication. It may be questions they refuse to answer. It may be indirect answers that dodge the real issue. Instead of coming out and saying what they mean, someone will expect you to figure out what is wrong. They may drop hints and expect you to guess at what is going on with them. They may say one thing when they mean the opposite. The relationship can sometimes feel like you are playing charades. You don't know what is going on because you have to guess all the time.
6. **Creating intimacy too fast.** Love-bombing is an example of this. Love-bombing is typically when you get overwhelmed with love messages, gifts, declarations of love, and promises very early in a relationship that are not appropriate. It takes time to know someone, no matter how many butterflies you get when you first see them. Human beings are complex and their behaviour is even more complex. You need to observe people in a variety of situations to really know them. I have had clients give up their friends, and yes even their families, and their jobs because of early promises and love-bombing. You may want the relationship badly, but think if this person has had enough time to know you well enough to make these declarations of love and commitment.
7. **Preying on you.** Often this is the domain of scammers, but it can also be people who are just predators. Which means they come after you for something that will benefit them, be it your money, your connections, sex, your status or reputation. If early in the relationship they want you to sell your house to finance some project of theirs, or you need to provide a lot of money which depletes your savings or damages your credit record, then stay away. And be careful of people who tell you that they are the only person in the world who will ever truly understand you and love you.
8. **Offering inconsistent affection.** This can be at a subtle level or more direct with regular on-off threats to end the relationship. They keep you slightly off balance with inconsistent affection. Safety is for most people, a critical aspect in a relationship. If affection is withheld at times and then perhaps lavishly displayed it gets confusing. Confusion creates a lack of safety and people feel off balance and unsure. On-off threats to end a relationship create uncertainty, insecurity, and sometimes are done to create submission. It can be through direct or indirect threats to break up or even specifically created situations to suggest or actually carry out a break-up. When working with a couple in marriage counselling, often one of the first tasks is to agree that the couple will be committed to the marriage without any threats of ending it during the time they are in counselling. For most relationships constant on and off is very destabilising and even scary.

The best way to know when a relationship is good for you is if you have experience of a good relationship. We like the familiar and so if you have experienced great relationships then you will be familiar with them and you will feel at home with someone right for you. You will know it, because you have felt it before. If you don't have the experience of a great relationship, then you don't really know what one feels like. And so, you can be attracted to and attract people who will not be good for you. If this is you, then this is why I wrote this article. Most of us invest a lot in a relationship, and when things go wrong it can be extremely painful. So be careful. It does take time and energy to consciously think of relationship dynamics, but it is better than ending up ensnared in a horrible situation that may be very difficult or cost a lot to get out of.