

HI LAURENCE,

The first thing I want you to explore is whether or not you really want a long-term relationship. Is your frustration because you really want a long-term relationship and your psychological issues are in the way? Or is the truth that you really just want short-term relationships and can't find support for that lifestyle?

A lot of social pressure exists to partner up and be in a relationship. Marriage and partnerships are society's gold standard and sadly those who choose to be single are judged negatively. I see many clients who come in and think they want a relationship because we are all raised to believe that is what we should want. But is it what *you* really want?

At a workshop I facilitated for singles on how to find and maintain a relationship, a participant approached me to thank me: I told him to be patient and with the new tools and information he received he would find real love soon. He looked at me and said, "Are you kidding me?! You provided me with all the information I need to not be in relationship. I prefer to date and just have fun and not get into all this harder work involved in a committed relationship!"

This man found permission within himself to go the counter-cultural route and choose singlehood. Had he tried to force himself to find and be in a long-term relationship he would have struggled because instinctively that isn't what he really wanted.

The three stages of relationships are romantic love, the power struggle and real love. Everyone enjoys romantic love because it is easy, fun and exciting, as you have found. The power struggle is much harder and brings up more conflict.

It seems like you are avoiding the power struggle and don't want to do the harder work. That is okay if the truth is you just want the fun and not the work involved in a long-term relationship.

If you do want a long-term relationship you will have to confront your fear of commitment head on. If you're motivated to do the harder work, that will demand therapy and some deep soul-searching. This can be painful and difficult but you can be assured you will transform in doing it.

You need to decide what you want in terms of longevity with a partner. Whatever you decide, be up front and honest with yourself and others. Here are some things to consider:

SHORT-TERM RELATIONSHIPS**BE UP FRONT WITH DATING PARTNERS**

Let your dating partners know up front that you are only dating and not invested in anything long term: You are dating recreationally only. This

is difficult to do because many may decide to avoid and not date you as a consequence, but this is part of the reality of choosing short-term relationships.

END THE RELATIONSHIP WHEN PROBLEMS PERSIST

After dating someone for a while, frustrations and issues start to rise. This is when the power struggle of all relationships begin. It's a positive indicator that you're with the right partner when these things happen and you work together to overcome them. However, if you don't want to do the work required to get past the issues, this would be the time to end and move on.

DATE MORE THAN ONE PERSON

Dating more than one person ensures that you won't become overly involved with just one person. It also excludes those who are looking for an exclusive long-term relationship as they won't want to date you.

LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS**BE WILLING TO ENTER HARD TIMES**

Relationships are hard work. They bring out the best and the worst in us. For you, Laurence, it brings out your inability to commit to someone. You enjoy the chase but not the catch. Deciding to stay requires you deal with the difficult thoughts and feelings that surface for you by keeping the catch and learn to get past them.

RECOGNISE UNRESOLVED CHILDHOOD WOUNDS

When leaving the honeymoon phase and entering the power struggle, your unresolved childhood issues with your mother and/or your father start to surface. In your case, Laurence, I wonder about your partners' unavailability and how that set the pattern for you to be the one chasing and not enjoying being chased back. This could be a great opportunity for you to work these issues through should you decide to stay in the relationship and face these ghosts from your past.

FACE PARTS OF YOURSELF YOU DENY AND BURY

By maintaining a long-term relationship you are forced to look at parts of yourself you may not want to face. Partners mirror back the best and worst of us. What they need most from us is hardest for us to give because it usually is the very thing we need to do for ourselves! If you're interested in finding the buried treasures which lie deep below, a long-term relationship will guide you to them.

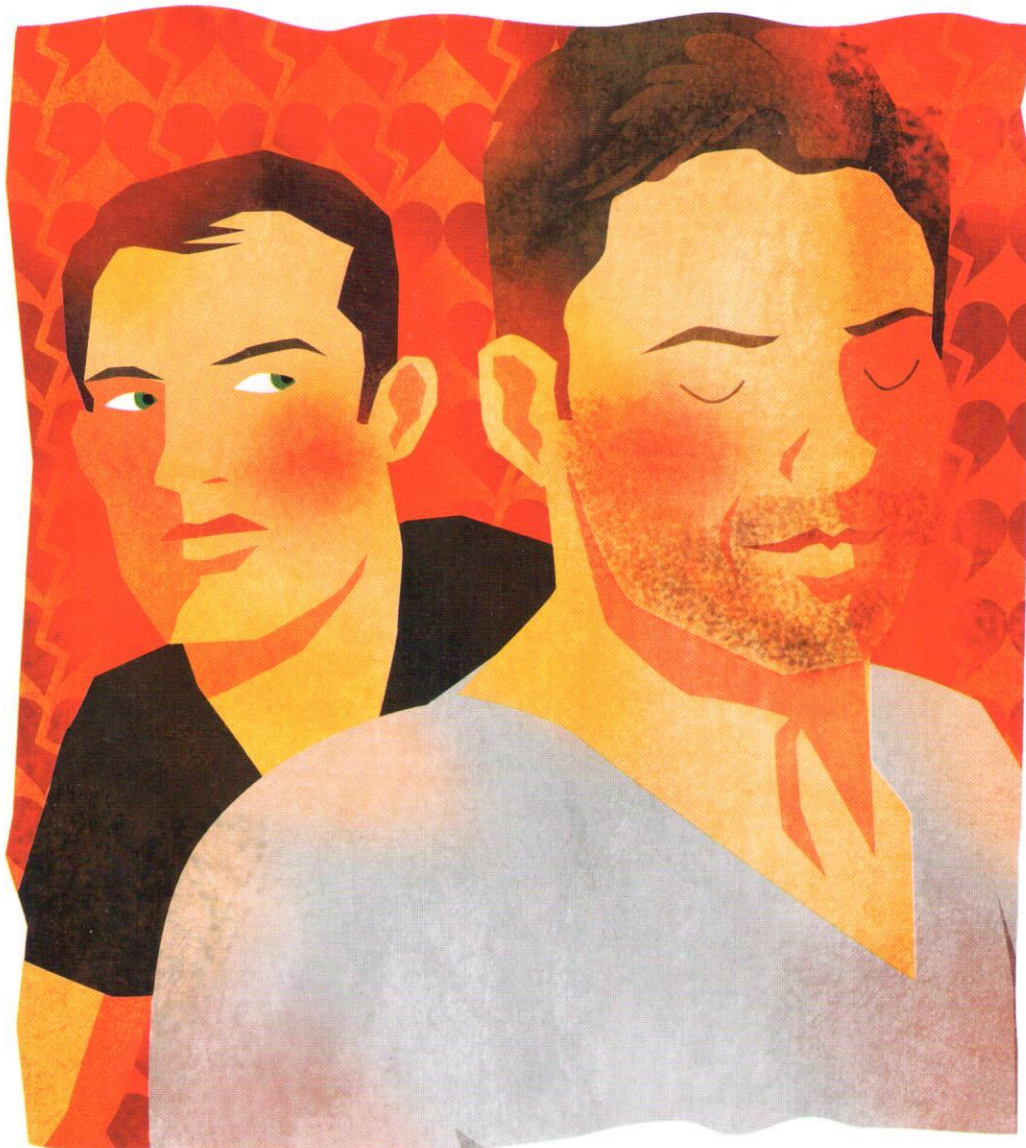
Laurence, my gut tells me that you do want a relationship and you want one to last. You have commitment issues which absolutely need to be addressed if that is ever going to happen. I recommend you enter psychotherapy but that you keep dating as well. I don't believe that you have to get yourself well first before finding a partner. That is a cultural myth! What is true is that healing your commitment-phobia can occur by actually committing to someone and facing the darkest parts of yourself and your past.

That said, it is totally acceptable for you to choose recreational dating only and avoid the harder parts of relationships. They do demand a lot of work which can be gruelling and frightening. Not everyone is up for it. Decide what is right for you!

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I'M ONLY ATTRACTED TO GUYS THAT ARE EMOTIONALLY UNAVAILABLE

▶ DEAR JOE

I've never seemed to have much luck holding down a relationship, and I'm starting to realise that I'm only attracted to guys that are unavailable, emotionally or otherwise. I enjoy the chase and the excitement involved when I'm pursuing someone, but if they start to show too much interest I find it a massive turn-off

and start looking elsewhere. When I am in a relationship I only enjoy it if it feels fairly unstable, and if things get too intimate or seem too easy I get bored quickly. I know that this isn't going to make me happy in the long-term but I can't seem to help how I feel.

LAWRENCE, KINGSTON ▶