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Following the 'rules'

Understanding dating etiquette



Michelle Mark

Do you know what the rules of behaviour are for one-night stands? Or for a sport sex session? When is it OK to insist on an exclusive relationship? How soon is too soon to have sex?

If you don't know, don't worry — you're not alone. The dating world is a confusing mix of changing rules and mixed messages.

In Part 2 of our special seven-part series on dating, the Sun's Michelle Mark looks at the etiquette behind looking for love.

The politics of dating are enough to send some singles heading for the hills, but a little lesson in etiquette could turn that first romantic liaison into a cool walk in the park.

Christine Hart, co-founder of Calgary's Six Minute Dates Inc., has spoken with hundreds of singles about what they think is proper dating etiquette and found chivalry really isn't dead.

"Before your date, have a quick conversation on the phone," Hart said.

"You want to get a feel for this person before you potentially spend an entire evening with them."

She also said both parties should verbally agree to be honest and considerate and to keep the first date short.

"Don't suggest a further activity unless it's clear that you are hitting it off," she said.

"If you decide on coffee, expect it to be just coffee."

A new www.calgarysun.com poll found half of respondents preferred a dinner and/or a movie for a first date, with the rest equally divided between something light (such as coffee) and an activity (sports).

If setting up a first outing isn't nerve-wracking enough, determining who pays for it could make or break the deal.

About 44% of Sun readers in the latest study are traditionalists who prefer the man to pay.

However, Hart says the new rule is simple: Whoever does the asking pays.

"If the bill is placed in the middle of the table the asker should slide it to their side," Hart said.

"Later on, and on future dates, dutch is acceptable."

In addition, keep the conversation light, avoiding topics like death,

divorce, personal problems and past relationships.

"Even if you have had the worst day ever, don't dump it on your date," Hart said.

"Talk about interests, ask questions of the other person."

"Listen and make eye contact when the other person is talking and elaborate on things you may have talked about on your pre-date phone call."

And while it helps to tell your date about yourself, Hart says go on and on about yourself is a big turn-off.

One of the most delicate aspects of a first date is how graciously it ends.

When saying goodbye, a quick peck on the cheek or a hug are not too pushy, but anything more could be the kiss of death on a first date, Hart said.

"The second date is a good time to have a quick kiss on the lips if all the signs have been there during the date, such as more lingering looks and more touchy feely interaction," she said.

Sun readers agreed, with a majority (65%) saying minimal contact (a hug, peck on the cheek) is enough on the first day. (Still, about one of seven respondents believe it's OK to get physical early by making out or even having sex.)

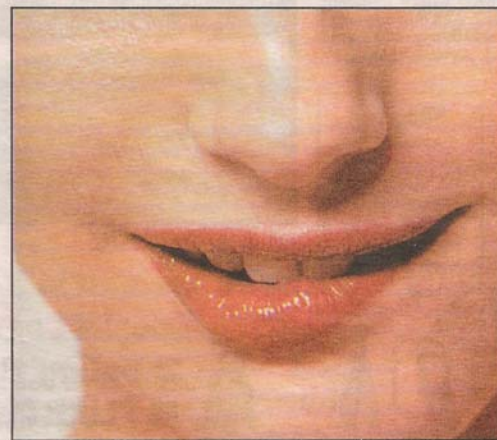
Hart says in many ways, old gentlemanly standbys still hold true for dating in the modern world.

"Open the door of the car," Hart advises for men.

"If you are going for a meal, open the restaurant door and pull out her chair if there is an opportunity to do so."

"At the end of the evening, walk the lady to her door and make sure she safely gets in."

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— Courtesy Superflirt (DK Publishing)

WATCH FOR SIGNS ... According to Superflirt author Tracey Cox, people should be aware of flirting signs. From top, a guy may signal he's interested by touching his face, while a gal may massage her neck or bite (or lick) her lips.