



Dating: Looking Beyond the First Impression

A gentle guide to noticing patterns, mutuality, emotional safety, and respect

Attraction can be real and a concern can still be worth noticing. One trait or difficult season does not define a person. Slow down and watch what repeats - especially when you say no, need support, disagree, succeed, or ask for repair.

At first, it may look like...	Over time, look more closely for...
Charm, chemistry, and passionate attention	Pressure to bond quickly; grand promises; intensity without steady, respectful follow-through.
Passion for justice or concern for people who struggle	Rigid us-versus-them stories; every ex, family, court, or organization is an enemy; revenge, entitlement, or conspiracy claims.
Someone who has been unlucky or needs understanding	A repeated refusal to take reasonable steps; expecting others to rescue or fund them; anger when limits are set.
Protectiveness and wanting to keep you safe	Monitoring, jealousy, deciding for you, questioning your whereabouts, or separating you from support.
A romantic hero who wants to save you	Needing to be needed; centering the rescuer role; discomfort when you become stronger, independent, or disagree.
Hard-working, ambitious, and dependable	Work is always given priority; little emotional presence, shared time, curiosity, or room for your feelings.
Vulnerability, pain, or a difficult past	Using hardship to excuse harm; reversing blame; repeated apologies without changed behavior or repair.
Confidence, leadership, or strong opinions	Contempt, humiliation, intimidation, always needing to win, or treating compromise as weakness.
Persistence, devotion, or fighting for the relationship	Ignoring no, privacy, time, sexual consent, breakups, or other clearly stated boundaries.
Generosity, gifts, or taking care of everything	Strings attached; scorekeeping; financial dependence used as leverage; control over work, money, or choices.
A powerful spark or exciting unpredictability	Anxiety, uncertainty, conflict-and-reunion cycles, or feeling you must earn warmth and avoid displeasing them.

Green flags grow clearer with time

Your no is respected. Care is mutual. Words and behavior match. They can apologize, repair, and change. Your success is welcomed. You can keep friends, interests, privacy, and choices. Feelings can be discussed without punishment, ridicule, or making you manage theirs.

Trust your pace. You do not need courtroom-level proof to slow down, seek perspective, set a boundary, or leave. If behavior feels controlling or frightening, consider a safety plan before confronting or ending the relationship.

Support: National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE | Text START to 88788 | thehotline.org

Learn more about healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns: loveisrespect.org