

MY DATING BOOK

J.ZENASTRAL



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Why this book on encounters?

Socially, socially, professionally and romantically, we spend most of our time meeting new people. We don't like solitude. We are constantly on the lookout for others. So it's not surprising that the word "dating" is one of the most frequently entered words in search engines.

The author of this book explores the meaning of encounter in its noblest and broadest sense. He offers us a synthetic and ideal vision of the world of human relationships.

But a relationship can't be taken for granted and raises many questions: should we expect it to be satisfying and long-lasting?

How do affinities develop? How does dating work? All these questions show that dating, love and sexuality are complex subjects. We don't always find the answers to our relationship problems when conflict arises or love is lacking. So how do we get out of conflictual and problematic situations? How can we experience a relationship differently? How can we let go? This book sets out to highlight the constraints inherent in each encounter, as well as the well-being it brings, and to show the creative force we can deploy to progress along the path of our inner quest and free ourselves from our past.

The author attempts to bring some order to a subject that affects us all. He focuses on the way in which the transition from a chance encounter to an established one takes place, and on the dimensions that he feels are fundamental to satisfying and fulfilling encounters.

How can we bring this book to life?

This book is a guide to encounters and relationships, a sort of travel diary, a real companion for those who wish to record the high points, the adjustments and the important changes in their friendly, sentimental, marital and professional lives. To bring this book to life, you can read it while putting the exercises into practice on a daily basis and writing down your personal thoughts and questions. There are blank lines after each chapter. You can write down your first encounters, your impressions and what you intend to do in concrete terms. Writing has the advantage of allowing you to take a certain distance from your experiences and to consider them in a more detached way. By periodically noting your progress and dating your observations, you'll be able to see how you're developing. Over time, these notes will give you an overview of how far you've come and how far you still have to go to achieve a more harmonious and serene relationship. They can also be used as a reference if you want to take stock of your life as a couple or to resolve a relationship problem in the presence of a therapist or a third party.

The emoticons in this book

Throughout this book and in strategic places, we have inserted emoticons to attract your attention and guide your reading. These "signposts" warn you of the type of information that could be of immediate use in making a success of a meeting or improving the quality of your relationship or your life as a couple or single person.

Guide to emoticons:



It's up to you to try:

This emoticon indicates a simple and effective exercise that you can do. If you don't have the time to do it right away, that's okay - you can always come back to it later.



Tip:

This emoticon highlights practical suggestions and advice to help you increase your well-being, to help you progress, to pave the way for your encounters and to embellish your relationship life.



It's your turn to write:

Great! Now you're a writer! As soon as you come across this emoticon, stop by to complete this book and personalise it to your liking, as well as writing down your impressions, your thoughts, your developments... So as soon as you come across this indicator, *get out your pencil!*

What is a meeting?

The meeting is a privileged moment between two people where each feels the presence of the other, two presences reflecting our humanity.

Meeting the other person is also "Kairos"¹ in Greek, that opportune moment, that significant chance, that fleeting but essential moment that can change the course of our lives.

The encounter is a moment of exchange and sharing, bringing into play our emotions, values, affinities, communication and sexuality, as well as our personal history, conditioning and behaviour...

We have a fundamental need to feel subtly or strongly connected to people who are important to us. From these people we expect them to be open, present or available and likely to listen to us. This means that one of our most essential expectations is to be able to talk to each other and to be heard.

¹ Kairos is the Greek god of the opportune moment, the right time to do things. It is linked to the intuition of the "right time", the time we feel is appropriate to orient ourselves and act. It is this special moment, this coincidence of human action and time, that makes the time propitious and the action good. The *Larousse encyclopédique* defines it "as an allegory of favourable opportunity, often represented as an ephebe with winged heels and shoulders".

What factors determine a meeting?

Do we meet by chance? Are we really free to make our own love choices? Why do we meet this or that person? Why do we bring certain people into our lives? Are our encounters made without our knowledge? Do they help us to become who we really are, to finalise unfinished business or to free ourselves from limiting beliefs?

There can be no encounter without interaction, without openness to the outside world and our social environment, without the desire to make up for what we lack. But the other person must also catch our eye, have something in them that resembles us or matches our expectations, interact where something in us echoes and pushes us to create a link.

We usually go through our meetings without asking ourselves too many questions about their purpose. They are rarely within our power to decide. Nevertheless, if we knew our motivations and our conditioning, we would be able to live each relationship to the full.

According to Gabriel Moser, author of "Les relations interpersonnelles" (Interpersonal Relationships), the first factors that determine a meeting are geographical and socio-cultural proximity, similarity of attitudes, shared interests and physical appearance:

-Some places, such as holiday clubs and leisure centres, encourage people to meet...

-We are more likely to meet someone with the same interests or the same social background. Affinities are built up between people from similar geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds.

-Physical appearance is a considerable asset in our society. It contributes to attraction. Good-looking people seek out the company of people they consider good-looking.

-We are attracted to people with similar opinions, attitudes and values to our own.

-We prefer people we consider competent and intelligent.

-Complementarity and compatibility play a role in mutual attraction and are essential for harmonious interaction.

-Recognition of similar attitudes, shared interests and matching needs and goals are all essential if a meeting is to lead to mutual attraction.

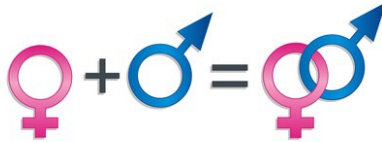
Why should we meet?

According to Aristotle, human beings need others in order to know themselves, to construct themselves and to exist. They cannot be aware of their own existence without also being aware of the existence of others.

Making connections is a way of integrating socially. Through our friendships and/or romantic relationships, we reproduce a semblance of social order. And if this order is so sought after, it's because it gives us a sense of security and well-being. The presence of others, necessary and even indispensable in certain situations, is in itself a source of positive reinforcement. The encounters we make throughout our lives also help us to succeed in our chosen fields.

Sometimes people want to be alone, because they are going through a difficult event or situation. But generally speaking, we all have a natural need to share our lives, to exchange affection, to give and receive, to know that we matter to someone and vice versa, and to know that we can tell each other almost anything.

Why are we attracted to other people?



What makes us attracted to one person rather than another?

Is it their physical appearance or a particular trait? Is there a secret alchemy at work? Could it be hormones? A compatibility of moods? Spontaneous mutual recognition? Pheromones? The intuition of being accepted unconditionally?

It's the combination of some of these factors that will certainly create a special chemistry. Physical attraction cannot be underestimated, as it has a major impact. It's not always linked to physical beauty, but rather to a detail that triggers a movement towards the other person. We consider it to be magical when we are connected to the other person by subtle, harmonious energies.

What are we looking for in each other?

In reality, the other person is another person and will never correspond to a pre-established ideal image. Yet we often try to meet people in the hope of finding the perfect match. This explains why we are constantly projecting facets of ourselves onto those we meet. What we see in the other person is not always really there.

To avoid any disappointment, it seems important to look for someone else in the other person **whom we recognise in their humanity and their difference.**



Tip:

-It's by recognising that the person you love exists first and foremost as another person, and not as an object tasked with filling your gaps or solving your problems, that you can move away from a situation of emotional dependence and enter into a fulfilling relationship.

The rules commonly accepted in a match

A person socialises by bonding with others and conforming to a set of commonly accepted rules, inherited from the code of conduct of life in society. These rules, which are obvious to us as we mature, are designed to maintain and finalise any relationship, to regulate problems of jealousy and to preserve any confidentiality. They are drawn up on the basis of what is and isn't allowed and of each partner's need to share the same level of intimacy with the other in a fair and satisfying exchange. One of the most basic rules in friendship, for example, is loyalty.

The diversity of encounters

A meeting can be fortuitous, freely chosen or sought after. Each encounter can take a variety of forms, from a relationship of simple shared pleasure, most often centred on the sexual or leisure aspect, with no desire to build a couple or envisage a long-term relationship, to an unexpected, remarkable encounter that awakens us, challenges us and transforms our lives. Generally speaking, people looking for love or pleasure are single. But there are just as many men and women who are looking for someone to change their everyday life, to discover something new, or to ensure that their relationship remains solid.

Encounters have thousands of facets. The ones we are particularly interested in in this book are the decisive, exceptional, quality encounters. The ones that are likely to lead to a stable and lasting love or friendship relationship. But what makes them special, and how can you tell them apart?

Meeting our parents: our first meeting



Our very first encounter is with our parents. Our emotional universe is built through the bond we first establish with our mother, then with both our parents. Later on, some people reproduce this mother-child relationship with a partner. Each relationship they form is like an attempt at reparation, compensation, a response to their lack.

For a child, the relationship with the parent of the opposite sex influences his image of man (for a girl) or his image of woman (for a boy), right down to his choices in love. In the absence of recognition of their sexual identity, for example, they do not feel comfortable in their femininity or masculinity. This can later have an impact on their relationship or love life.



Tip:

-The first model of a couple being that of your parents, ask yourself about the quality of their relationship and what led them to live together.

-Try to analyse how your parents' relationship influences your own romantic behaviour.

The formal meeting

Formal encounters are characterised by sentimental and sexual indifference. It is only when you become romantically or sexually involved, or both at the same time, that the meeting is of a friendly or romantic nature.

It's possible that an initial sentimental or sexual indifference could evolve into a deeper encounter. But generally speaking, most of our formal encounters are never followed up.

The amorous encounter



Romantic encounters involve reciprocal feelings of love and/or the practice of sexuality. Love and sexual desire are the essential components of this type of relationship.

The amorous encounter is an unpredictable, surprising event that occurs with the full awareness of two presences drawn to each other, simultaneously experiencing those moments of eternity that pass through them, precious moments, sources of shared joy and pleasure. The double 'miracle' of the amorous encounter is, on the one hand, to

be two people in the same state of mind at the same moment; on the other hand, to feel that you have a particular mutual affinity for the other.

Numerous literary examples depict this starting point for love in an encounter where the difference is pronounced, with each person belonging to a different social class, clan or country. William Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* best embodies this duality, with the two protagonists belonging to enemy worlds.

Here is an extract from Franco Zeffirelli's film:



The need to declare one's love, to bear witness to the mystery of the encounter, to embark on a high-risk adventure, is irrepressible. Every declaration of love, every 'I love you' is a response to the need to exorcise the chance of the encounter, to keep the flame of love alive in the eternal present. According to Alain Badiou in *'Eloge de l'amour'*, every love relationship has to be reinvented if it is to last. We add 'to become part of a succession of moments of eternity'. The moment of the miraculous encounter promises the eternity of love, but there is the challenge of facing up to concrete realities and constantly being on the brink. It is important for a couple that their relationship, which depends on social rules and norms (the demand for exclusivity is the most obvious manifestation of this), is approved by society and their community. The couple is strengthened by resolving its conflicts and differences. Repeated,

poorly resolved conflicts lead to dissatisfaction or a break-up. It is this process of conflict resolution that explains why communication is so important in a couple.

When certain conflicts are not resolved, we could decide unilaterally to end a love affair. But would this decision make sense? Doesn't the love we feel for someone remain in our hearts even if we start another relationship? We can envisage the end of a relationship, but perhaps not the end of love, because it is not certain that love belongs to us.

Is living in a couple synonymous with love and sexual exclusivity?

For a long time, marriages of interest were the rule, and love was sought outside marriage. It is only in the last three centuries that sexuality has been moralised. Religions and then bourgeois values restricted sexuality.

Then, the rule of exclusivity in love and sex was challenged by those who believe that a possessive and exclusive relationship limits our freedom and that of the other person, and blocks the exchange of love. To possess the other would be to avoid the possibility of being met by the other. There are therefore two types of couple: the closed couple and the open couple, so that everyone can find their place, both having their advantages and disadvantages.

- Some people believe that in an open couple, each person builds their autonomy, energy is renewed and others are integrated, but the relationship may not always acquire the same quality as a closed relationship.

- Others believe that a closed couple provides security, allows a long-term commitment and facilitates stability, but can also become an obstacle to the development of two people.

Many people want to get away from all forms of judgement and live according to new socio-affective behaviours. Especially as we can no longer accept living without love. Love is becoming primordial, even taking precedence over the couple. Today, with the advent of social democracy and parity, the couple is less and less subject to the established order. Fidelity is difficult to maintain and no longer means sexual exclusivity. It provides a degree of comfort, but no solution to the fundamental insecurity. Too few couples manage to maintain a passionate relationship over the long term. The Internet, Viagra, individualism, the acceleration of time, geographical mobility, longer life expectancy, the increase in the number of separations and therefore in the number of single people, Internet chatrooms, proximity to people in the workplace all make it easier for people to meet and allow the same person to experience a succession of romantic relationships over the course of his or her life. As a result, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of people leading a double or even triple love life. It is above all the 'relational' qualities that are important in a couple. This does not mean that sexual infidelity is trivial, but it is not central to the definition of the contemporary couple.

A different concept of the couple and of love is emerging on the horizon and is being sought through us. We are living through a change of society, and even of civilisation, in which new models of couples are being experimented with.

Today we talk of polyamory, of multiple, concurrent or successive loyalties. More and more men and women are trying out a second or third relationship to experience the love they didn't find in their first. Others refuse to promise anything by voluntarily and willingly leading a single life.

It's true that falling in love is an unpredictable event, but can you learn to love?

For E. Fromm, one of the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, the art of loving is a moral lesson in respect for others. He puts forward the idea that love is not a feeling that comes naturally, but that it must be nurtured and cultivated. In *L'Art d'aimer*, he wrote: "The first step is to realise that love is an art, just as living is an art...". For most people, the essential problem of love is to be loved rather than to love, to be capable of love"... "Love is a personal experience that can only be understood by the individual. Love is a personal experience that it is up to us to realise by ourselves and for ourselves"... "You have to learn a lot of other things before you can get into art itself. As far as the art of loving is concerned, this means that anyone who aspires to become a master in this art must begin by **practising** discipline, concentration and patience in every phase of his or her life." ... "For man to be able to love, he must reclaim his rightful place as supreme. Society must be organised in such a way that man's social nature, his loving nature, is not separated from his social existence, but is one with it.

According to the philosopher Krisnamurti, in order to know love, it is obvious that no opinion, belief or speculation should be involved: "Love and don't get caught up in

ideas and opinions about what love should or shouldn't be, because when you love everything is right, everything is clear".

The friendly meeting

"The best thing in a man's life is his friendships".
Abraham Lincoln

Friendships are unique in that they do not necessarily involve sexual relations. In friendship, we love each other, we value each other, and we enjoy doing things together. For some people, friendship is essential to their own well-being. For others, it is associated with entertainment, with people with whom they have activities in common.

Unlike romantic relationships, friendships are not subject to the obligation to resolve conflicts, which arise naturally in any relationship. In friendships, conflicts lead either to a weakening of intimacy and complicity, or to a gradual distancing, without however causing a break-up as is more often the case in a romantic relationship. The low number of rules and restrictive social norms governing friendship makes it easier for several friendships to coexist at the same time.

According to certain statistical studies, loyalty, trust and mutual assistance are the most important qualities required of a friendship, as they guarantee that confidences are kept secret. This is not the case, for example, in a formal relationship between work colleagues.



Tip: how do you make friends?

Here are a few tips for making friends, most of which are inspired by those suggested by Dale Carnegie in his best-seller "How to make friends":

-First of all, decide who you'd like to be friends with. Then ask yourself what interests you would like to share with these people. It's also important to find yourself with people with whom you feel an affinity. Don't waste your energy on people who don't help you or who undermine your confidence. Surround yourself with supportive people. Some of your friends' advice is invaluable. Not to mention the fact that they're sure to have the key people in their address books to guide you through the process and bring your plans to fruition.

-To win friends, take the first step, make the effort. Be welcoming and smile. When you meet someone for the first time, memorise their first and last names. To win over their sympathy, greet them warmly and eagerly, and show your interest by giving them your full attention when they speak. Take an interest in their life, their personal history and their experiences.

-It's not enough to have friends, you also need to know how to keep them, get to know their personalities, know how to please them and talk to them. Remain flexible, don't impose your own desires. Know how to listen so that the other person enjoys the conversation. If the person is reserved but ready to talk, try to start the discussion on their favourite subjects. Encourage them to talk about who they are and what they do. To get them interested in you, take an interest in them. Ask her questions but avoid being too direct.

Try to see her qualities. Compliment her sincerely. Show your gratitude and encouragement. True friends are not won through flattery or by trying to impress them, but by showing genuine interest and admiration. Avoid being too frank.

-Not organised enough to see your friends? Set yourself a "friends schedule". Find time in your week to devote to these relationships. To make friends, you need to give yourself time off, go out, accept as many invitations as possible and seize every opportunity.

-Maintain your friendships and keep up the good work. Keep in regular contact by phone, Internet and text message. Go out with them regularly. Give gifts. Create convivial moments. Share what you love. Above all, don't expect your friendship to provide you with everything you need. If you do, you'll be creating dependent relationships, not friendly ones.

-In any case, don't expect others to call you back; it's by giving attention that you receive it. Define a common project, share a hobby, become a confidant on a specific subject. This will create deeper, stronger bonds. Tell your friends how difficult it is to maintain your friendships. This confidence will be a sign of trust that will nourish your friendship.

-If you notice that some of your friends have been neglected, get back in touch with them. They'll be grateful and you'll rediscover the joy of shared friendship.



You write: *I write the list of potential friends and the interests I want to share with them:*



It's your turn to write: *I'm writing my friendship schedule: I'm writing down the times of the week I'm going to spend with my friends:*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

The synchronous meeting

An encounter is synchronous when it seems to emerge in our lives at a decisive moment and when it strongly echoes an inner need for transformation, a need to broaden our understanding of the world. In this type of encounter we feel that there is something magical going on, and we have the impression of living in a world where everything seems to be interrelated. We find meaning in the person we meet because they change and transform our lives. We even wonder what our life would be like if we hadn't met that person.

The unexpected and happy encounter

Following an unexpected encounter, a person's life can sometimes take a new direction that they had not previously envisaged.

This is what happened to singer Julio Iglésias and actor Harrison Ford, to name but two examples:

Julio Iglésias' career is purely accidental. His sporting talent led him to become a professional footballer. It was a car accident that kept him in hospital for two years that forced him to put his career on hold. He met a nurse who lent him a guitar to keep him busy during his convalescence. It was a revelation for him: on leaving hospital, he won first prize in a singing competition in Spain.

Actor Harrison Ford worked as a carpenter for director George Lucas. During a discussion, Harrison Ford mentioned his dream of becoming a film star. Out of sympathy,

George Lucas offered him his first role in the film "American Graffiti", followed by a major role in the film "Star Wars".

These providential events of life challenge us and lead us to question the presence of another reality behind the world of appearances. Are these mysterious events simply the result of chance? Can we encourage happy, unexpected encounters? Can we take advantage of favourable opportunities where we least expect them?

This is also the question posed by Voltaire in his tale 'Zadig or Destiny'. The central theme is the role played by destiny, which manifests itself in human life in the form of fortunate events that occur for no clear reason.

This is also the subject of the film "Serenpity", written by Marc Klein: two people meet by chance, lose each other and then find each other again, before finally realising their romance. The heroine, Sara, believes that fate places signs in our path that we need to know how to decipher.

The "shock" meeting

What is a "shock" meeting?

The "shock" encounter, this "nascent state" of love, is the most romantic form of encounter. It is sudden and intense. Emotions, sensations and desires are heightened. A veritable internal revolution, love shock destabilises us. In an instant, we are no longer in control of anything, past ties seem blurred and our usual points of reference are turned upside down. Caught up in a surge of love, some people are ready to give up everything on a whim: husband, wife, children, job, etc.

What happens when you have a "shock" encounter

The 'shock' encounter imposes itself on us. It takes place in the present moment, when time ceases to exist. It is a sudden event that opens us up to a different existence. A fascinating moment when everything is still possible, the 'shock' encounter can be spotted by its characteristic symptoms: when the other person is there, nothing else matters, this other person who seems to fill a gap, a void; a search for fusion ("I'd like to melt into him/her", "I can't stop thinking about it"); the loved one is adorned with all the qualities, his/her faults erased, his/her positive points hyper-valued ("he/she's wonderful!", "she's sublime!"). "); the lover is anxious, jealous, constantly on the lookout for signs of the other person's love.

Albert Cohen, in his romance novel *Belle du Seigneur*, describes the love trance of the first moments:

"O beginnings, O pleasures of the woman in the mouth of the man, juices of youth, sudden truces, and they looked at each other enthusiastically, recognised each other, gave each other furiously fraternal kisses, on the cheeks, on the forehead, on the hands. Say, it's God, isn't it?" she asked, bewildered and smiling. Do you love me? Tell me, it's only me, isn't it? No one else, right? she asked, and she gave her voice golden inflections to please him and be more loved, and she kissed the stranger's hands, then touched his shoulders and pushed him away to cherish him with a divine pout. "...

Let us also listen to Phèdre (in Racine's Phèdre) talking about her emotion when she saw her son-in-law Hippolyte for the first time:

"I saw him, I blushed, I paled at the sight of him; A turmoil arose in my distraught soul; My eyes could no longer see, I could not speak; I felt my whole body shiver and burn."

When and where a "shock" encounter occurs

If sociologist Francisco Alberoni is to be believed, love at first sight is a phenomenon of all times and places. Everywhere, it provokes the same reactions, comparable to those of a revelation. We are hardly predisposed to fall in love unless we take the risk of projecting ourselves into an entirely new world. It's impossible to fall in love voluntarily, even if you really want to. Just as it is unlikely to fall in love with two different people at the same time, because

our heart in its passion for love throws itself entirely towards a single objective. Its vision is therefore one-sided.

Why do we demand exclusivity?

We want to be loved as unique, extraordinary, irreplaceable people. In this "nascent love", we can only be monogamous and demand exclusivity.

Can we provoke a "shock" encounter?

There is no such thing as being predisposed to a "shock" encounter. Lightning can strike anyone, at any time. And, more often than not, it strikes those who least expect it. Love always comes upon us without warning.

Is a "shock" encounter akin to a state of grace?

The force of "love shock" is such that it cancels out any possibility of choice. This is why **the state of love is a state of suffering**. In love, everything seems possible. Falling in love makes us rediscover a world that seemed devoid of flavour. The state of being in love awakens our deep desire for an ideal world and makes us believe that it is finally attainable. The encounter with another, this other, puts an end to our past life to create a new movement of life. *"We die and are reborn into something else"*.

How do you dispel the veil of delusional love?

Some people believe that true love must inevitably begin with this 'shock' encounter and then evolve into perfect

harmony. This is the very type of illusory love that the media and cinema promote by constantly showing love affairs that are as brief as they are frequent. Love gets stuck in its romantic beginnings of narcissistic satisfaction. But in the "shock" encounter, realising the illusion is particularly difficult. After all, aren't we convinced that this is a sacred love, the sign of an infallible destiny? The trap of illusion can lead us to believe that the other person is just as much in love. In many cases, this dizzying attachment is not shared. When the illusion of love at first sight disappears, disappointed lovers feel they have missed out on life.

Can a shock encounter lead to a lasting relationship?

Love at first sight inevitably leads to a crisis, but this is not always fatal, admits Alain Delourme. In fact, many long and beautiful love stories begin that way. Their continuity is due to the fact that they are accompanied by the distancing work that is necessary for any encounter, even more so when it's love at first sight. The image of the partner having been overestimated, you need to be able to enter into a relationship with the real person: in other words, with someone else. Only then can life as a couple begin. But only if each of you takes responsibility for your own problems. If the "shock" encounter does not lead to a mature love, with the sharing of daily life and a shared life plan, the fire will go out as quickly as it was lit.

Can we love forever?

There are some deeply bonded couples, on whom time seems to have no hold. But these couples are rare. As soon

as divorce was legalised, its ever-increasing use left little doubt about the fragility of the emotional ties that bind couples together. Let's face it, love is fragile and doesn't always last.

According to Lucy Vincent, Doctor of Neuroscience and researcher at the CNRS, author of "Comment devient-on amoureux", love is a short-lived chemical process. She supports the theory that love is a behaviour "programmed" to ensure the attachment of a man and a woman for the period necessary for the survival of their child. The choice of lover would be based on unconscious criteria linked to compatibility and fertility, such as smell (pheromones), which can be used to detect a complementary immune gene pool to ensure that the offspring has a wider range of antibodies and is therefore healthier. If a couple is formed, the human being is initially genetically programmed to love his partner for three years, the time needed for a child to be less vulnerable in the wild.

Lucy Vincent, in her original thesis, does not specify what **programmes in the brain this type of behaviour** that "ensures the attachment of a man and a woman during the period necessary for the survival of their child". So how do we explain the attachment between two people after the age of fifty? Should we assume that the brain is programmed for reasons other than ensuring the survival of a child, or should we generalise and say that we are 'programmed' for every moment of our lives? Reducing love to reproductive imperatives or a biological process makes no sense and shows our inability to grasp its full dimension, which eludes us. To better grasp this dimension of love, shouldn't we be asking ourselves these types of questions: what stands in the way of the manifestation of love? How

can we love each other over the long term? How can we maintain love on a daily basis? And so on.

Relationships that last are those in which each takes the trouble to be interested in the other, each enriches himself with information about his intellectual life and can explain in detail why the other is wonderful. Each person knows how to respect their own strengths and weaknesses as much as those of the other, has a good self-esteem, is available for the other and surrenders to the joy of life while remaining realistic and building a day-to-day reality step by step.

Meetings in the workplace

The workplace has always been seen as a neutral zone, hermetically sealed off from feelings and love. Most people separate the workplace from their love life. But in reality, office romances are becoming increasingly common. Work is taking up more and more space and the boundary between private and professional life is becoming blurred: late-night meetings, drinks, work dinners, parties, seminars and so on. What's more, it's easier to fall in love with people you spend a lot of time with.

There are also other factors that are making it increasingly difficult to separate love and work in companies, such as those linked to changes in society:

- There are more and more women in the workplace.
- Moral attitudes to sexuality are freer.
- The duration of celibacy is longer.
- The growing adoption of teamwork strengthens the bonds between colleagues

The likelihood of meeting someone is therefore high. According to a study by Monster, almost 30% of couples are formed in the workplace. These days, it's increasingly difficult to separate love and work, especially since the Auroux laws of 1982 do not prohibit romantic relationships in the office. You absolutely cannot be dismissed for having a romantic relationship with one of your colleagues. Employers are obliged to respect their employees' private lives. It is only if the relationship is creating problems and leading to untenable working conditions and atmosphere that they can and must intervene.

There is no evidence that the quality of work is impaired by this type of relationship. Some companies even consider that the formation of couples - lasting ones, of course - in their midst reinforces their good social image. However, other companies recognise that there are risks associated with romantic relationships at work. They can affect productivity or have a negative impact on the working environment (favouritism, jealousy, mistrust of others, back-biting, etc.). This may be the case, for example, if the relationship ends badly, or for certain types of relationship, between a manager and his/her subordinate, or between a married person and a non-married person, or between two members of the same team.

What you need to know:

-The relationships that last are the ones where you have managed to remain cautious and discreet, to establish a boundary between your professional and private lives, and to evolve within your work in different worlds.

-It's best not to flaunt your relationship, so as not to embarrass your colleagues.

-If you work in the same department, there's no point in hiding your relationship with a colleague. It is preferable, if the relationship is serious, to make it official and possibly ask for a change of job so that it remains private and does not interfere with work. It's best to inform your employer. Particularly if the relationship poses a conflict of interest problem.

-When a relationship with a colleague breaks down, it is best to remain constructive and correct. Everyone needs to take responsibility, reflect on the consequences of the

break-up for their work and convey a clear, shared message to their colleagues.

Online dating

Internet dating sites have become a veritable social phenomenon, with several million people already using them. Sociologist Pascal Lardellier (author of the book "Le Cœur Net") has conducted some very interesting research into the subject. A growing number of people are getting to know each other, talking to each other, revealing their personalities, their tastes and a part of their intimacy before discovering each other physically.

Long-distance dating did not start with the Internet, but is part of a much older crisis. The number of singles is constantly increasing. Faced with the difficulty of meeting singles, marriage agencies have responded with discretion and efficiency. Since the 60s, other ways of meeting people have emerged. Less expensive, classified ads flourished in newspapers and magazines, fuelled by the rise in the number of single people. Then came Minitel in the 80s. At the end of the 90s, the Internet, social networks, dating sites and chat rooms revolutionised seduction strategies. We were entering a new age of relationships. Anyone could surf a dating site. All you need is a nickname and a profile, and then you can write messages to each other or chat live. Protected by the screen, the anonymity of the pseudonym and the distance, Internet users can be daring, even the most shy. In the past, relationships were based on face-to-face encounters. Nowadays, people seduce each other without knowing each other and they love each other virtu-

ally. But can we make the right choice based on multiple physical, social and moral criteria, when everything depends on ticking the right boxes? On the Internet, according to some statistics, the search for a relationship seems to be the main motivation. Users of these sites seem to be moderately satisfied with these encounters, finding them practical but not very effective. Only 5% of Internet users will have a serious encounter that lasts. Even using dating sites, the quest for love remains a difficult path, strewn with pitfalls and disappointments.

Most female internet users are looking for a serious date. Some are looking for Prince Charming. Others dissociate the feeling of love from sexual desire and construct an image of the other person close to a dream they have within themselves. As for the men on the site, many are looking for quick adventures that will eventually lead to love.

This revolution through the internet and its social networks is having considerable relational effects. It is forcing us to reconsider our notions of social ties and relationships, and to think about them differently. The traditional criteria for defining relationships have been turned on their head by the advent of the Internet.

**Tips and tricks:**

- Give yourself the time you need to explore the dating site*
- Show patience*
- Plan meetings quickly after the first exchanges, to avoid disappointment*
- Diversifying the ways you meet people*
- See this as just one of many ways of meeting people*
- Have realistic expectations*
- Don't take offence if you fail.*

Plural encounters

Plural or polyamorous dating refers to those who are involved in several relationships at the same time, with the consent of their partners and on the basis of a single set of improvised rules so that everyone can live out their relationships with complete peace of mind and confidence. The "possessive" aspect of relationships is considered to be something to be avoided.

Meetings by culture or country

Every country, people and human being has a different culture. An intercultural encounter, with or without a language barrier, can be very powerful, full of emotions and often rich in lessons to be learned.

We reach out to others more readily abroad than in our own city or country. In a new place, we need other people. For example, we sometimes feel the need to ask someone in the street for directions. And if that person helps us, we feel grateful. The need makes us go towards the other person, and once the conversation has started, it can continue. With the other person, we are encouraged to exchange ideas, and it is this richness of exchange that is the strength of an intercultural relationship.

But it's not always easy for two cultures to meet, even if there is no language barrier. Sometimes it takes time for the meeting to take place and for the language to be decoded.

European intercultural meetings

Initially, intercultural encounters help to accentuate prejudices and unconscious projections of our system of reference onto others, as the authors of the book 'La pédagogie des rencontres interculturelles' (The pedagogy of intercultural encounters) relate. Young people very quickly distance themselves from these prejudices, perceive differences, come to terms with them and recognise the relativity of their own system of norms and values. In this way, they develop a philosophy of life and intercultural knowledge. Prejudice is not an obstacle to meeting others. On the con-

trary, they should be used as a lever to understand the other as a person in his or her own right and what makes him or her a stranger in our eyes. As the same authors emphasise, this requires everyone to adopt certain constructive attitudes, as is necessary in any encounter in general (see the following chapters on this subject).

Here are a few examples:

- Opening up to others.
- Change your usual way of perceiving and thinking.
- Accepting others as others, not as equals or enemies.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Overcoming your fear of foreigners.
- Recognise the relativity of our reference system.
- Talking things through until you come up with a joint project.
- Deal with conflict patiently and productively
- Stop setting your own traditions as absolutes.
- To be able to acquire a broader identity, such as that of a citizen of the world.

Education and intercultural communication

School is a place where children will meet the Other, where they will be confronted with difference, with cultures that are different from their own family culture. They will have to learn to respect these differences and understand that they themselves have a culture that is neither universal nor fixed. Intercultural teaching values these differences so that each child can learn from the others, and the children themselves can enrich their peers. Teachers

who practise this type of teaching will try to decentre themselves and propose different models, without remaining in an ethnocentric vision where it is mainly European culture that is emphasised. The classroom becomes a place where each child can express themselves and assert their difference, by sharing with others.

Encounters with a book, a piece of music, a film...

In the course of our lives, we also come across a book, a film, music, ideas, symbols, a place, etc., that have moved us or transformed our lives.

These encounters are decisive if they occur like a catalyst at key moments and if they resonate with what is waiting to be transformed within us. Try to find the context of an encounter with an author, an artist, a piece of music... Look for the impact of this context in the course of your life and ask yourself the following questions: why am I fascinated by this or that author? When did he or she come into my life? How did they manage to move me?

Many novelists have tackled the theme of falling in love. Here, for our enjoyment, are some selected texts and film scenes from famous novels:

-In Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*, Frédéric Moreau falls under the spell of Mme Arnoux:

He had never seen the splendour of her brown skin, the seductiveness of her waist, or the delicacy of her fingers as the light shone through them. He gazed at his work basket in amazement, as if it were something extraordinary. What was her name, her home, her life, her past? He wanted to know the furniture in her room, all the dresses she had worn, the people she had known;

and the desire for physical possession itself disappeared under a deeper desire, in a painful curiosity that had no limits.

The heroes of this novel are portrayed in the film scene that follows, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud and Françoise Fabian:



-It's also reminiscent of Félix de Vandenesse's love at first sight for Madame de Mortsau in Balzac's novel *The Lily of the Valley*. In this scene from the film, Madame de Morsauf wonders if her choice of Virtue was a mistake:



-We all have memories of the meeting between Mme de Rénal and Julien Sorel in Stendhal's *'Le Rouge et le noir'*, played on screen by Gérard Philipe and Danielle Darrieux:



There are many examples of love encounters, and although the theme is taken up again and again, there is always a great deal of originality in the way it is dealt with. All these novels are imbued with emotion and sensitivity: we see the intensity of the feeling of love, the disturbances it provokes and the metamorphoses it brings about.

The encounter with oneself

"Be yourself, everyone else is already taken".

Oscar Wilde

"I is another

Arthur Rimbaud

We suffer in relationships because we lack self-knowledge. The encounter with ourselves begins when we are sincere, which implies being in touch with what we feel inside. This means listening to our emotions, our conflicts, our protective reactions against insecurity and what is happening in our body, without trying to avoid what is painful or to preserve the image we want to give to others. This requires courage and overcoming certain fears. We have to learn to stay in touch with ourselves to find out what we want and what we fear.

Our inner life is rich. Yet we are constantly called upon by our social obligations and the presence of others, and as a result are constantly distracted from ourselves. The experience of silence and solitude is an inescapable necessity if we are to refocus and rediscover ourselves. This return to oneself in solitude is essential for building and fulfilling oneself.

Self-knowledge can also come from contact with others. Any encounter can invite us to a rendezvous that reveals us to ourselves, and the person we meet can have a decisive impact on our lives. Some encounters make us feel more like ourselves. They allow us to transform ourselves and reveal unsuspected facets of ourselves. However, some

encounters can also upset us and make us question our beliefs and our conception of existence. These encounters occur especially during periods of transition when the emotional charge is high. Indeed, many encounters occur at pivotal moments in our lives. They echo the needs of the individuation process², a process during which we become a fully-fledged individual, autonomous, adult, independent...



Tips and tricks:

-The more we know about ourselves, the freer we are and the more likely we are to make the right choices and build rewarding relationships.

-To discover what we don't know about ourselves, we have to make ourselves available for encounters.

² According to the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, human beings must free themselves from the collective soul, from the security of the tribe, and go through the experience of solitude. He believed that this process was inevitable and called it individuation.

How do you make a success of a meeting?



At this stage of the reading, you've gained a deeper understanding of what you want from a relationship, and thanks to this awareness, you'll know how to make the right match.

The first date is an important step. It triggers emotions and feelings that are invaluable for what happens next. There is one basic rule: **say what you want from the relationship from the outset**. Daring to express your fears, needs and desires helps to avoid initial misunderstandings.

After a first date, it's best to wait a few days before proposing another one. Allow time for your impressions of the first date to take effect. It may be that euphoria is preventing you from remaining realistic. Conversely, if you have a tendency to see things in a negative light, a little distance can help you to get a better grasp of the situation.

The more realistic your expectations of the person you've met, the less likely you are to be disappointed. But there's nothing to stop you texting the next day to say that you enjoyed the date. If the other person doesn't show up, their

silence can be interpreted in several ways. It could mean that the other person isn't interested. But it could also mean that they are simply afraid of making a commitment. The best way to find out is to make yourself known. Say that you would be delighted to continue the contact. This will dispel any doubts. Before phoning or texting, make sure that the person you are talking to is expecting these messages, and that they are not bothered either personally or professionally.

During the meeting, it's essential to take in every piece of information the person you're meeting gives you and to be aware of what you're feeling inside. Try to analyse your feelings and be clear about what you want. This information will be useful when you take stock of what happened during the meeting. Certain observations may reveal the way the person you met relates to you: is he or she respectful or contemptuous, authoritarian or self-effacing? Don't be too quick to pass judgement: by being too preoccupied with whether this is the right person for you, you run the risk of missing out on a real encounter. For real contact to happen, you have to give time to time and be aware that there's no point in forcing the other person into a space that isn't theirs.

You can be yourself when you can relax and feel good, without forcing anything. It's thanks to this inner calm that we can find the person who really suits us. Discovering the other person is an important stage. This second stage, during the meeting, should enable us to clarify our likes and dislikes, to discover how the other person works, our similarities and our differences. A relationship has to be built.

It's a process, the outcome of which we can't know immediately.

A beautiful encounter is one in which we feel love, esteem and complicity for a person. It may be someone who, at first glance, appeals to us on the whole. But it can also be someone we like more and more, and in whom our interest grows as we get to know them better.

Being ready for the meeting

To encourage a link, a meeting, I am ready to apply the following affirmations:

- ☐ I know who I am
- ☐ I have confidence in myself
- ☐ I know what I want
- ☐ I'll let it come
- ☐ I'll avoid making a film
- ☐ I can rise above my condition
- ☐ I will not judge
- ☐ I'll cultivate a sense of humour and kindness
- ☐ I will respect and appreciate differences
- ☐ I will act constructively
- ☐ I've solved my personal problems

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Prepare for the meeting

Despite all the care that can be taken in preparing for a meeting, and given that it is impossible to foresee everything, it is better to allow for a degree of unpredictability. Even the best-prepared meetings are not immune to unexpected events that can change the course of events. We may, for example, meet someone we weren't expecting, but that meeting may be just as interesting or more interesting than we initially envisaged.

The healthy response to this is to open up passionately to the unknown. By remaining receptive to the unexpected, by approaching our encounters in a resolutely positive way, by remaining curious, observant and by trusting what we feel, we will attract happy encounters capable of transforming our lives and making them more exciting, more harmonious, more pleasant and more relaxed.

Live in attentive anticipation of beautiful encounters and happy coincidences, while training yourself to accept what comes your way, to live in the present, to welcome and celebrate the unexpected with clarity and serenity, to get out of your conditioning, to overcome your limiting beliefs and to remain curious about everything.

When preparing for a meeting, leave enough room for spontaneity and flexibility. Change your habits by exploring other places and meeting other people than those you usually frequent. Know how to surprise and amaze yourself. Learn to follow your intuition and seize every opportunity, especially when you least expect it.

It's by getting out of your comfort zone and taking risks that you'll experience an extraordinary, exciting or simply attractive adventure.



Tips and tricks:

-The key to meeting new people is to create opportunities. It's important to give yourself opportunities to meet new people and, as far as possible, people with whom you have affinities, common interests and similar values.

-The best way to encourage a relationship or a meeting is to show genuine confidence and act constructively. Taking action without worrying about the result is an effective strategy.

-If you're looking to meet someone on the Internet, choose a reputable site where the uniqueness and qualities of each person are highlighted. Check Internet users' profiles. Only talk to available singles who live not too far from you.

-If you join a singles club or marriage agency, only join if you feel comfortable there, and choose one that is experienced, has a large number of members, an age category that suits you and a sufficient number of people willing to meet you. Check that the majority of members are looking for the same type of relationship as you. Check the selection criteria. Don't sign up with an agency that accepts everyone. Trust your intuition too.

-Whether on the Internet or by post, personalise your ad as much as possible, make it different from the others, attractive and original. Avoid pseudonyms and Internet addresses based on your real name. Don't give out your income and don't talk about sex. Never give out your personal address, telephone number, surname, home or work address. State clearly, directly and realistically what you expect from a relationship and ask interested parties to respond

only if they share your expectations. If you decide to meet, make sure it is during the day, in a busy public place.

-In general, take every precaution to ensure your safety, while remaining confident and benevolent.

Developing good manners

Savoir vivre is a form of intelligence that Harvard University professor Howard Gardner calls "interpersonal (or social) intelligence". Good manners consist of identifying other people's feelings, anticipating their behaviour and grasping what is at stake in situations. In other words, it is our ability to live in harmony with others. This form of intelligence is not built on the accumulation of rules or concepts, but is developed through our ability to solve relational problems, to understand what is appropriate (or not) in our exchanges with others (detecting emotions, grasping innuendo, interpreting behaviour, sensing what is disturbing, etc.), in other words, to know how to react in an adapted and appropriate way to different situations.

Good manners are also a certain willingness to understand social rules. Before 1968, knowledge of the rules of good conduct was essential for good behaviour in society. May 68 swept away all these good manners. By the mid-1980s, the climate was favourable for a certain return to good manners and propriety. Schools of etiquette and etiquette courses were springing up all over the place. These schools, courses and books also taught what gallantry was, a mixture of politeness and attentiveness on the part of the man towards the woman, expressed through coded acts. Here are a few examples of a common scenario on a first date: arriving on time for an appointment, complimenting her, opening the car door for her, preceding her before entering a restaurant, helping her to take off her coat, giving her the best seat at the table, waiting until she is seated

before taking her turn, serving her a drink, paying the bill in the restaurant, etc.

By using and respecting social rules, we show that we belong to the same world as the other person. It's a way of being accepted, respected and put at ease. These codes help us to understand each other better, to situate ourselves in relation to each other and to bring people closer together. These codes are generally useful and make life easier.

Some naturally master social codes and communicate easily. Others don't know how to behave in society and feel uncomfortable. But there are ways of feeling more at ease. Let's take the example of saying hello many times a day, all over the world:



If its automaticity bothers you, you can make it more lively and welcoming. You can say hello by showing esteem and sympathy for the other person. A sincere hello requires you to be fully present to yourself and to others. Saying hello is much more than a ritual; it's also a sign of recognition and belonging. In the mountains, for example, greetings are more frequent than in the city, because on hiking trails we recognise each other in the same efforts and in the same satisfaction of seeing beautiful landscapes.

In situations or countries where you do not know all the rules in force, we advise you to adapt your behaviour to the context.

In all cases, by showing yourself to be smiling, curious, open, respectful, tactful, attentive and considerate, you are naturally adopting the right attitude to encourage a successful meeting.


By developing and working on your social intelligence, you'll find it easier to relate to others and you'll be seen as interesting and charismatic.

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Daring to meet

You can only meet people when you feel good about yourself, enjoy yourself and take care of yourself. When these conditions are met, take the initiative to enter into a relationship with others. Be daring! Go out and meet people, ask them out. The atmosphere on the first date is crucial. Don't forget that the person you are meeting is also tense at the prospect of this first meeting. If you know that the other person is in roughly the same frame of mind as you, you can put the situation into perspective and feel more relaxed and spontaneous. The aim of a first date is first and foremost to get to know the other person, not to rely on appearances and to decide whether or not you want to meet up again and go further. So don't rush into anything, or try to get intimate too soon. Pay sincere compliments without going overboard. Take an interest in the other person, don't be too distant and let the discussion carry you along.



 It's up to you to write: *what initiatives will I take to bring about a meeting?*

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Assertiveness

Knowing how to assert yourself to defend your territory and your rights, with the essential rule of ensuring your survival and well-being without harming others. If you assert yourself by accepting what others are and what they want, you will experience relationships that are both deeper and freer.

We need to realise that we can't always succeed at everything. This belief that we have to succeed at everything we do can inhibit our assertiveness and push us to remain in the shadows rather than take action. If the expected results were nuanced (not everything can be black and white) and if we learned to evaluate success or failure in terms of intensity, we would have less difficulty asserting ourselves.

To free ourselves from the fear of failure, we can push our reasoning to the limit and imagine what the consequences of failure would be. But I can also imagine positive consequences. It's by examining both the advantages and the disadvantages, by weighing up the pros and cons, that we find the courage to take the plunge.

It's also a question of finding a balance between being all-passive, which can lead to a lack of courage and feelings of frustration (frustrations that often lead to low self-esteem), and being all-assertive, which can lead to the image of someone who is intransigent and enjoys conflict situations.

Some possible repercussions of a lack of assertiveness:

- ☐ You feel negative emotions
- ☐ You have a poor self-image
- ☐ You give a bad image of yourself to others
- ☐ You no longer know what you want
- ☐ You don't get what you need or want
- ☐ You find yourself doing what others want you to do
- ☐ You're in conflict with everyone
- ☐ Those around you get angry or tired
- ☐ Those around you use you

If you're having trouble asserting yourself, it's essential to face up to what's really troubling you and build up your confidence. If at such times you feel fear, look at it without looking away, note the feelings that accompany it and ask yourself how this fear began. By not blocking yourself to this fear, it will fade and you will reduce its hold on you. If you manage not to block the flow of emotion and to draw energy from this fear, you will notice that it makes you stronger.

By asserting yourself, you are moving towards a deeper, freer relationship, in which each of you accepts the other as you are and as you desire.



Tips and tricks:

-Surround yourself with positive, constructive and encouraging people

-If you find it hard to assert yourself, put yourself in the shoes of someone more assertive than you and imagine what that person would do in the same situation.

-To combat frustration, regularly ask yourself: what can I do to get good results? Draw up an action plan, take the necessary steps, take action and observe what happens. Take note of the results and adapt your next actions according to the results obtained.



It's your turn to write: *as I assert myself, I notice an improvement in my well-being:*

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How to start a conversation

To start a conversation with someone you don't know, approach them from a reasonable distance, look them in the face with a smile and say your first sentence. Don't hesitate to start a conversation with banalities (the weather, for example). Avoid sensitive subjects such as politics. If you lack imagination, look around you and talk about your surroundings. Contextual observations easily provide a topic for discussion. When you start a conversation, watch how the other person reacts to your words. Do they smile? Do they follow up with questions?

If you want the conversation to continue:

Start by talking about yourself. Gradually reveal your emotions. To make it easier to speak without experiencing difficulties, work on yourself beforehand and prepare for the first meeting. Drawing up a somewhat structured portrait of yourself will help you to feel more comfortable talking about yourself. In addition to getting to know yourself, it is also very useful to find out what image you usually project. To talk about yourself with confidence, you need to know what you want to bring out in your personality and what you don't want to bring out. When in doubt, don't hesitate to ask your friends what they like about you. Is it your humour? Your listening skills? The way you tell stories? And so on.

To be interesting, believe in what you're saying. Your topic of conversation should take into account the type of person

you are talking to. Ask yourself what you would like them to know about you.

If you have a passion, tell us how you discovered it, how long you've been doing it and what it brings you.

Talk about what you like, believe in what you say. Take an interest in the person you are talking to, for example by asking if they share your tastes. Get them to talk and listen.

If the person is relaxed, ask open-ended questions. If they are reserved, ask closed questions. Share speaking time fairly. In most cases, all you need to do to end a conversation is change the subject.



It's your turn to write: *what difficulties do I have in starting up a conversation?*



It's your turn to write: *I have a passion. I write about how I discovered it, how long I've been doing it and what it brings me:*



It's up to you to write: *I write what I want to highlight about myself or what I'd like the person to learn about me:*

Avoid certain subjects

We meet for the first time to get to know each other and to consider starting a new relationship.

It may happen that the conditions of the meeting don't suit you, so don't show your discontent, just stay calm and in a good mood.

If you lack confidence, you may be tempted to look for a subject that you know something about or are passionate about. At the risk of boring your interviewer, talk about it delicately and lightly.

Certain attitudes such as disparagement or mockery can be misinterpreted. It is even possible that the person you are talking to does not understand your humour, for example if you use irony or cynicism.

Certain subjects, such as politics or financial matters, may not be of interest to everyone. If in doubt, it's best to avoid them. The same goes for typically masculine or feminine subjects (cars, football, clothes, shoes, make-up, hairstyles, etc.).

You can talk about your romantic past, but avoid dwelling on it and comparing it with the person in front of you. There are also taboo subjects that are best left unspoken when you first meet someone. Sex, for example, is still a sensitive subject for most people.

If you want to have a child, of course you have to say so. But the first meeting is neither the time nor the place to agree on this type of subject. Just let it be known that children are part of your life plans.

If you want to give the impression that your life is rich in experiences, look for optimistic topics of conversation (this

Being a good listener

Listening is one of the foundations of dialogue and human relations, the basis of all forms of communication. The verb "to listen" comes from the Latin "auscultare", which means to be attentive to what is being said in order to hear and understand it. Listening therefore requires us to be there, available (physically and psychologically), ready to welcome what the other person has to say, willing to give them enough time and space to be themselves, to exist. In this space, not only must there be someone, but that someone must be able to put aside their preoccupations, their certainties, their preconceived ideas, their fears, even their taboos or grievances if need be. It responds to our relational needs to be heard and to be recognised. We need to be listened to about our real feelings, our experiences and above all our questions and doubts. We want active listening to help us dare to say what sometimes seems difficult to express. This wish is not always fulfilled and many people do not find the sympathetic ear they need.

Why is it so difficult to listen to others?

Goethe said: "to speak is a necessity, to listen is an art". The ability to listen is rarely innate and we find it difficult to put others before ourselves. Reacting to what others have to say is not always easy. Those who do listen may be afraid of not finding the right words. Active and sincere listening requires a certain amount of effort. But if you really want to understand the other person, listening is obviously easier.

But how can we cultivate the "art of listening"?

Listening is neither simple nor natural. It has to be learned and perfected over time, just like language. To listen to others, we need to take a little time when they seek us out, to "forget ourselves" and keep an ear open for their feelings, questions, expectations and concerns. Active listening therefore requires availability, tolerance and respect. Whatever the person talking to us, listening requires us to invest ourselves in a dynamic way, to really be there for the speaker. Listening requires us to make an effort, to concentrate and to pay attention.

Listening also means keeping quiet:

In our everyday conversations, we rarely remain silent when someone else is speaking. We are constantly interrupting each other and bombarding each other with questions, often without even realising it. The result is that each of us hinders the other's thinking and puts them off centre. Listening without speaking is an art. The first step to listening well is to make the effort to be silent and respect the silence. To achieve this, you need to observe your emotions, delay your reactions, and hear what is not said, because the essential is sometimes expressed in silence. It doesn't come naturally at first, but the more you learn to listen, the more you enjoy doing it. And with good reason: when you listen sincerely, the other person becomes fascinating.

Listen, without judging:

When someone tells us about their distress, the only thing we can say is "I'm here". Listening means giving the other person space to tell their story without giving them advice, judging them or lecturing them. It means accepting the silences that allow them to reflect and adjust their thinking. It can mean simply being silent and nodding. Or rephrasing what they're telling us, which shows them that we're trying to understand them, and allows them to go deeper. You can also ask them to elaborate: "Can you tell me a bit more?"

Learn to listen without making judgements, put the other person at ease and they will feel heard and understood. You can, of course, disagree and express this, but always take care to make it clear that you are open and that you can hear an opinion contrary to your own without trying to change it.

Learning to reformulate:

One of the secrets of good listening is the ability to rephrase and repeat what the other person has just said.

Here's an example:

- How are you this morning?
- I'm ill.
- Oh, you're ill.
- Yes, I feel like I've got the flu.
- You've caught a cold.
- Yes, yesterday I waited for the bus in the cold.
- There was a transport strike

- Yes, I've waited a long time.
- You won't be able to work.
- Yes, it bothers me a lot.
- You're really worried.
- Yes, I'm worried about my job.
- You're worried about major changes.
- Yes, I'm afraid they're going to decide to make people redundant...
- Are you worried about becoming unemployed?
- And so on.

The person answering just repeats what the other person has said. They don't add anything.

Listening without giving advice:

Giving advice without really knowing what it's all about or putting yourself forward completely cuts off communication and signals the end of the exchange, without you even realising it! Questions like "What's bothering you?" can be seen as an intrusion! If, on the other hand, you answer "if I understand correctly, you're really worried", you're simply showing them that they can talk, you're opening a door without asking them an indiscreet question!

Don't think in the other person's shoes:

When someone close to you confides in you about their problems, avoid taking their place and telling them how they should act. You should also avoid trying to understand what is tormenting them and giving them advice: "If you're in this situation, it's because of...".

Encourage the speaker with your body language:

Nodding will indicate that you hear what they are saying and will encourage them to continue. Adopting a posture, attitude and movements similar to the person in front of you (the mirror effect) will help the person to relax and open up.

Use body language to show your interest:

Active listening involves the whole body and face: show interest and meet the person's eyes from time to time. Don't embarrass them by deliberately staring.

Read between the lines:

Listening also means knowing how to read what is left unsaid and decode silences. Always be attentive to what has not been said and to clues that can help you assess the speaker's true feelings. Facial and body expressions give as much, if not more, information than words.

What are the benefits of listening?

It's good for everyone to be listened to. When you can tell someone how tired, sad or disgusted you are, you feel soothed. When you can share your joy and your plans, you feel stimulated. Listening has a powerful psychological impact. It creates a genuine climate of respect, esteem and

trust in any relationship. When we listen to each other, we understand each other, which prevents intolerance. Listening also allows you to get rid of your preconceptions. When someone confides in you, you listen attentively, helping them to express their feelings. If you feel listened to and understood, you are encouraged to express more: this prevents you from keeping all your emotions to yourself and provides a degree of reassurance. Listening also encourages you to formulate ideas and become creative. It's a real help in finding solutions to problems.



It's up to you to try:

Exercise: I listen without interrupting

Practise this exercise with your partner or any other person. Let's imagine that your pseudonyms are Claude and Dominique. Claude will be the speaker and Dominique will be the listener. Claude's words may be recorded.

- 1) Claude chooses a subject that interests him (i.e. a film, a travel experience, a family event, a hobby, etc.) and talks about it for three to five minutes. Dominique's task is to listen without interrupting Claude.
- 2) When Claude has finished telling his story, Dominique summarises what she has heard without asking Claude any questions. Claude tells Dominique how accurate the summary is (i.e. inaccurate, somewhat accurate, totally accurate). If necessary, Dominique listens to the recording to get a better idea of any inaccuracies.

3) Then Claude and Dominique change roles. Claude becomes the listener and Dominique the speaker. We repeat the exercise.



It's your turn to write: *how did you feel when you were speaking?*



It's your turn to write: *how did you feel when you were listening?*



It's your turn to write: *what has affected your listening skills?*



It's your turn to write: *what would help you improve your listening skills?*



It's your turn to write: *if your attention waned while the other person was talking, what were the reasons?*



Your turn to write: *did you want to ask the speaker any questions? What questions?*



It's your turn to write: *if you were distracted while listening, what distracted you?*



It's your turn to write: *compare your answers with those of your interviewer:*



It's up to you to try:

Exercise: improving the quality of my conversations

You need to make a regular effort to improve the quality of your conversations and exchanges. This requires availability, kindness, curiosity, distance and a certain amount of self-forgetfulness. This effort must be gradual. Initially, do the following exercise over and over again with people you feel comfortable with. As you become more comfortable, practise with people with whom you have differences of opinion. Use everyday situations to help you improve. For example, in a conversation with a friend or colleague, try following one or more of the following instructions:

-I'm not giving my opinion.

I ask open-ended questions to explore my interviewee's point of view.

-I use positive echo techniques: "ah yes", "absolutely", "I see", "that's right", etc.

-I synchronise my posture and voice with that of the person I'm talking to.

-I adopt his point of view.

-I concentrate on what the other person is saying

-I listen attentively and with an attitude of acceptance.

-I show I'm listening by nodding.

-I maintain eye contact with the speaker.

-I use eloquent gestures to show that I'm paying attention to what's being said.

-I use words of encouragement to encourage the person to continue.

- I don't interrupt.
- I don't doubt his words.
- I avoid preparing my answer while listening
- I'm not changing the subject.
- I don't say "Are you sure? "It's not so bad" "You'll feel better tomorrow".
- I'm not judging.
- I avoid filling in the blanks
- I'm taking the time to breathe.
- I'm patient and relaxed.
- I'm not contradicting you.

I'm trying to understand what prevented me from listening properly:

- ☐ I was absorbed in my thoughts
- ☐ I was too preoccupied with my personal problems,
- ☐ I couldn't wait
- ☐ The topic of discussion was boring me
- ☐ I was tired
- ☐ I was prejudiced against or disliked the speaker
- ☐ I wanted to impose my point of view
- ☐ My interlocutor's speech was too long or confusing
- ☐ The voice of my interlocutor was monotonous, expressionless



It's your turn to write: *I write down what has worked well in my conversations (my strong points):*



It's your turn to write: *I'll make a note of what I can improve:*

Decoding signs and gestures of love

During a discussion, what is said implicitly (non-verbal communication: silences, gestures, postures, facial expressions, tone of voice, rhythm of speech, clothing, etc.) complements the spoken word and helps us to understand what the other person wants to communicate to us. It is facial expressions that best express emotions such as joy, surprise, sadness, anger and fear. The eyes are certainly the part of the body that expresses the most about us. Don't we say "the eyes are the mirror of the soul"? Certain signs and gestures punctuate, reinforce, nuance or even contradict what words express. Non-verbal communication expresses emotions, feelings and values.

The first thing we notice about a person is their general appearance. This is what gives us our first impression. Clothes express emotions and feelings, particularly through their colours. Some, like miniskirts, jeans and low-cut tops, send sexual messages, while others, like suits, blouses and overalls, convey a certain social status. The objects we wear also speak about us, our values, our priorities, our history, our culture and so on.

How do you know if you're attracted to each other?

Here are some signs that you and the person you're meeting have a good rapport right from the start:

If the person you meet is a woman:

- ☐ She touches you as she speaks

- ☐ She laughs or smiles a lot
- ☐ She often leans towards you
- ☐ She touches her hair
- ☐ It imitates your gestures
- ☐ His arms and legs are never crossed

If the person you are meeting is a man:

- ☐ He often leans towards you
- ☐ He strokes his arm
- ☐ He's looking at you
- ☐ He manages to touch you
- ☐ He extends his departure
- ☐ He mentions a second meeting
- ☐ Arms and legs never crossed



It's up to you to try:

In a discussion, it's not just what you say that's important. It's also the way you say it that will determine what happens next. If, during a discussion, the signs you send are not in line with what you say, it's because, for various reasons, you want to show emotions other than those you are really feeling. Part of the communication could then be out of sync with what you want to show. That's why it's important to pay attention to what you're feeling.

To ensure that your next meetings are a success, use the exercise suggested in the chapter entitled "Living your relationship in the present". It's an effective way of becoming aware of the gestures you make mechanically, your thoughts and your emotions, and thus of making it easier to match what you say with what the other person perceives you to be saying. Don't forget that any discrepancies blur the message and can cause embarrassment and misunderstandings.

Take your time before making a commitment

At the start of a relationship, we are generally in a positive frame of mind, free of all contingencies. But there comes a time when we feel the need to anchor our relationship in something solid, to set it down over time, whether for ourselves, for society or for those around us.

But there's no point in rushing into things. Moving in together straight after meeting someone, or getting bogged down in the daily hassles of life too soon, is a recipe for a failed relationship! Favouring slow progress allows you to build solid foundations, overcome certain fears and anxieties and make a natural commitment. Taking your time is essential for getting to know each other and for checking the seriousness of the relationship.

Before you seal your love, explore the real reasons why you want to be together. Then examine the reasons why you want to become more involved in your relationship. Ask yourself the following essential questions: what values do we share? What are our common interests and affinities?...

Some people are apprehensive about commitment. There's nothing wrong with being afraid to make a commitment at the beginning of a relationship, because you don't yet know the person well enough to know if they're the one you want to be with. You may want to fulfil your potential as a couple, but still want to claim your autonomy and continue to fulfil your potential as an individual. You may hope that the relationship will last but be afraid that it will end in

failure. You may also doubt yourself and think that you are not up to the task.

If the person you love is afraid of commitment (which is mostly the case with men), don't put them under pressure and don't expect too much from them from the outset.

It's best to ask the other person clearly and gently what they want from the relationship. Is it an ephemeral relationship or one that will last? You can also try to assess the other person's degree of attachment and desire to commit. There are some very revealing signs: absence of joint projects, lack of interest in what you do, distancing, a relationship focused solely on sex, no "official" introductions (parents, friends, etc.), etc. If this person is hesitant about getting involved, give them time to feel like it. Know how to remain mysterious, make them want you and create a feeling of lack.

How do you make a relationship last?

After a successful encounter, the desire arises for the relationship to last, because the idea of being in a relationship for the long term is reassuring (and sometimes also seems to fill an existential void). This desire is necessary if the relationship is to continue, even though we know that longevity is neither guaranteed nor a guarantee of quality. Some couples live their whole lives together, but many break up.

What are the reasons why we want our encounter to last? Many factors fuel this desire, such as the pleasure of love and sexual satisfaction, but also the strong desire to prolong this precious intimacy, the wish to be important to the other person, the certainty that your partner is irreplaceable, the fear that if the relationship ends, you will have to start the whole process of getting to know the other person psychologically and physically all over again, the need to develop plans together, etc.

This desire to last is therefore natural, but on its own is not enough to ensure a long-term relationship.

So what are the conditions for a satisfying relationship to last? That's what we're going to look at in the following chapters. First of all, you need to know if you are ready to make the encounter work.

Be ready to bring the meeting to life

So the meeting has taken place. You don't know much about the person you're meeting and have everything to learn: how compatible you are, how well you can adapt to each other, what their faults are, but also - and happily - what their qualities are.

It's impossible to predict the outcome of a meeting. The euphoria of the beginning can fade in the space of a few days, or on the contrary, the questions and doubts can gradually fade away to make way for trust, complicity and complementarity.

The tendency today is to look for a "turnkey" person, without taking into account the other person's realities and differences, which can become inconveniences for you. So we need to be sure that we can live with the other person's differences, whether or not they are a hindrance, a stimulus or tolerated.

If you're exasperated by someone who doesn't live up to your dream image, it's better to let them go to someone who will appreciate them. If you feel anxious, nervous or afraid, then something is wrong.

Be particularly vigilant in the following cases: if you feel you are being criticised, scorned or made to feel uncomfortable, if you have to show yourself to be different from who you really are, if you feel invaded by the other person and have the impression that they are running your life. Talk to this person and try to understand why they behave in this way.

You should also be on your guard if the person you meet is indifferent and speaks negatively about the opposite sex, or if from the first moment you meet them they want to be loved immediately, for themselves alone and forever. This could be a sign that the person you meet is too fragile or needs to be looked after, or that they are seeking control.

Finally, some encounters are doomed to failure, particularly those with inaccessible people (a star, a priest, a doctor, a shrink, a person from a culture incompatible with their own, a married person...).

Are you ready to bring the meeting to life? To help you answer this question, we suggest you take the tests below.

Before moving on to the positive assessment test, ask yourself: what bothers me about the other person? Classify the disadvantages in two columns, the major disadvantage and the minor disadvantage. In the third column, indicate whether this disadvantage can be changed or transformed and whether your request for change is realistic and respectful.

To find out whether the person you meet is the right person for you and whether you are firmly committed to staying together for the long term, check that:

- ☐ We have a good rapport with this person
- ☐ In his presence I feel full of energy
- ☐ I feel comfortable and at ease with her
- ☐ With her I dare to say what I think
- ☐ I want to spend more time with her
- ☐ I want to get to know her better and see her again
- ☐ She wants the same kind of relationship as I do
- ☐ It takes into account my likes and dislikes
- ☐ It gives me a positive image of myself
- ☐ We expect the same from the relationship
- ☐ I'm ready to spend some time with her
- ☐ I feel I'm being listened to
- ☐ We understand each other
- ☐ I can remain myself in his presence
- ☐ I can show my strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ I can confide in you in complete simplicity
- ☐ Our time together is increasingly enjoyable
- ☐ The more we get to know each other, the stronger our bonds become
- ☐ I have a lot or a lot in common with her
- ☐ We're made for each other



It's up to you to try:

Here's a cloud of keywords. Choose the ones you and your loved one think are important and write them down on the next page.



Each person explains to the other what they think of the words they have remembered. Do they mean the same thing to each person? Which words are important to both of them if the relationship is to last?



It's your turn to write: *your choice of words:*



Your turn to write: *words chosen by the person you love:*

Before examining the conditions for a relationship to last, you should know that the essential starting point for preserving the quality of life together is to become aware of the way you are and the impact your attitudes have on your partner.

If the tests reveal that you're not ready to consider a long-term relationship, then be patient, keep calm and remain realistic.

If you're both still very young, there's no need to focus right now on finding a compatible partner and a stable relationship, which would require a lot of effort and time. There are times in our lives when we are not capable of this (studies, desire to discover the world, maturing...). We advise you to enjoy life, go out and meet new friends and lovers.

Living the relationship in the present

How can you last without getting caught up in routine? How can you keep a fresh eye on your partner? How can you live with them every day as if it were the first time?

Routine takes over our lives when we look at things through the eyes of the past.

So how do you live your relationship in the present?

By staying in constant touch with how we feel. To become aware of our emotions, reactions and behaviour, we need to direct our attention inward.

In every everyday situation, direct your attention to your partner, looking at them as if you were seeing them for the first time, while remaining attentive to what you yourself are feeling. Thanks to vigilance, habit no longer has a hold. Everything becomes magical and alive! You feel the other person's presence as beneficial.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Challenging yourself

For the relationship to evolve, we need to be open to questioning. This means being open to criticism or reproach and accepting strong reactions, even anger.

When we are in conflict with someone, we tend to look for the cause in the other person. We could avoid many fruitless discussions and quarrels if, before accusing our partner, we examined ourselves to identify our own responsibility. Any conflict in a couple is a godsend for progress. The relationship between two people is a privileged context for understanding ourselves.



Tips and tricks:

- To make a relationship last, you need to be able to question yourself, to change and to resolve your relationship problems, while abandoning the idea of trying to change the other person. Take a look at yourself and your partner.*
- Periodically, ask the other person if you have offended or hurt them, or if they feel loved enough. Show them that you understand them. Think about what you want most from the relationship and share your feelings and expectations.*

Learning to talk to each other



To understand each other and find a balance, partners need common references. Communication is the only way to ensure that everyone is moving forward on the same basis. If the current doesn't really flow when you discuss things together, if you disagree on certain subjects, if you don't always understand what the other is trying to tell you, etc., highlight your differences of opinion.

For an effective discussion, choose a time and place where you will not be disturbed, distracted or interrupted, with enough time for everyone to fully understand or better express their conceptions, opinions or ideas. When someone expresses an opinion with which you disagree, listen carefully and try to understand the reasons why. By improving your communication techniques, you'll enjoy the discussions more.

Expressing a point of view is inevitable, even if it means taking the risk of being wrong and displeasing others. On the other hand, allowing yourself to be carried away by the opinions of others means shirking responsibility for your own words.



Tips and tricks:

-Read to form more personal opinions and develop your interpersonal skills.

-Discuss, question, rather than taking the word of others at face value. Learn to question everything you believe.

-Avoid "You", "Always" and "Never", judgements, criticisms, questions instead of answers, cutting off and interrupting conversations...



It's up to you to try:

Examine which of the following prejudices prevent you from speaking up:

- ☐ I never have anything interesting to say
- ☐ I can't find the right words
- ☐ To speak you have to be intelligent
- ☐ He (she) will realise how embarrassed I am
- ☐ To speak, you need to be comfortable in public
- ☐ You have to say things that interest everyone

Talking about money as a couple

Money issues dominate the couple's discussions and are a major source of conflict.

Do you enter married life with the idea that you owe nothing to anyone? The trick is to find arrangements that allow you to advance your joint projects while retaining a degree of autonomy. Look together for the model that best defines the way you manage your money. Decide which of you will handle the accounts. Decide together on major purchases or investments. Agree from the outset what is a joint expense and what is an individual matter. To avoid the hassle of having to keep track of the accounts all the time, you can opt for a joint account while keeping your personal account, with each of you contributing in proportion to what you earn.

Don't turn a blind eye to financial difficulties. Don't avoid the subject by thinking that the problems will magically disappear, that everything will be sorted out one day or that there's no need to risk an argument over it. Don't hide the real cost of things from your partner.

Arguments about money are much better than no discussion at all. Battling over management or budgetary issues can highlight the potential difficulties that are bound to arise as life together progresses. Knowing how to talk about money as a couple is the best way of ensuring that the wallet does not become a source of discord.

When your couple runs into money problems, talk together about the restrictions that need to be considered so that no one feels cheated. Don't lock yourself into a role of victim or passivity. When faced with financial difficulties, the challenge is to try not to suffer the situation entirely, even

if you didn't choose it. Learn to live with lack, with loss. You have to know how to lose in order to gain.

Being financially dependent on your partner can generate tensions if the relationship of dependence gradually cuts you off from social reality or creates a fusional relationship, which usually ends in conflict.

There's no reason to feel inferior when your partner earns more than you.



Tip:

Agreement must be reached on how to manage resources. When faced with disagreements about money, ask yourself: why do I find it so difficult to let go of my own habits? What's stopping me from imagining that we could do things differently?

Establishing an empathetic relationship with others

Empathy is the ability to identify and understand what another person is feeling, whatever that feeling may be. The important thing in empathy is to express to the other person that you understand their emotion. This requires being attentive to the other person, accepting them as they are, with a warm and encouraging attitude and a sympathetic ear.

Before you can understand the other person's feelings, you have to start with yourself. Are you in tune with your feelings? Are you aware of the emotions that run through you, such as joy, anger or sadness? **Do you really want to enter into an empathetic relationship with the other person?**

In this chapter, we offer you a method for developing your sense of empathy and a process for sharing what others are feeling:



It's up to you to try:

Exercise 1 to develop my empathy:

- Being there for others means listening attentively and being available. Listen very carefully. Notice, for example, the different inflections in your voice. Observe every indication of the feelings that run through the person you are talking to.
- Don't judge, let the person talk, listen with respect and take the time to observe. Let them find their own solutions to their problems.

-By dint of trying to understand, you will naturally end up sharing her emotions and understanding how she feels.

-Use your body language to demonstrate your attentiveness: catch the other person's gaze, lean slightly towards them, don't stand still. Nod and smile when they say something appropriate. It's all about building a relationship of trust with the person who is sharing their feelings with you. To encourage mutual understanding, show, if possible, that you too can be vulnerable.

-Help without necessarily interfering. Try to understand the other person's needs without reducing everything to your own experience. Put yourself in their shoes and remain sensitive to their happiness. Be happy about their successes and sad about their failures, contribute to their well-being.



It's up to you to try:

Exercise 2 to develop my empathy

Read each statement in the following list and tick the box that applies to you, being as honest as possible:

- ☐ I know how to recognise what I'm feeling
- ☐ I like watching people
- ☐ I realise how others feel
- ☐ I am a caring person
- ☐ I help others to express their feelings
- ☐ I can easily feel the atmosphere
- ☐ I can explain why a person might have a particular reaction or emotion
- ☐ I'm aware of the impact I have on others
- ☐ I'm a good listener

- ☐ I readily accept other people's points of view, even if they differ from my own
- ☐ I can imagine how I'd feel if I were in that situation
- ☐ I refrain from finding solutions for others
- ☐ I am attentive to the needs of others
- ☐ I don't judge other people's confidences

Count one point for each box ticked. If you score less than 5 points, empathy is not easy for you. Perhaps you are one of those people who blocks out their emotions. The following exercises will help you to develop your empathic potential:



Your turn to write: *1) I describe a situation in which I lacked empathy:*

2) I relive the scene by putting myself in the other person's shoes. I write down what the other person saw, heard and felt:

3) I write how reliving the scene through the other person changes what I thought or felt about the situation:



Your turn to write: 4) *I imagine flying over the scene and myself underneath with the protagonists of the scene. Is it that important to do this in this situation? Is it really worth it? What do I gain by doing this? I write down what this situation inspires in me:*

5) *I re-watch the film with all the new considerations from the first 3 phases and write down how I will act next time in a similar situation:*



It's up to you to try:

Exercise 3 to develop my empathy

To understand the other person without using gestures, writing or words, we suggest the following exercise:

You're sitting opposite someone on a bus, in the underground, on a café terrace or in a waiting room. Look at them discreetly, putting your gaze on their shoulder. Observe their general attitude, the expression on their face, the emotions they are showing. Try to imagine the reasons for these emotions.

Try to guess who this person is and what they do (by their hands, for example, can you tell if they are more intellectual or manual? Etc.). Situate them in terms of their character, health, profession, family life, concerns and tastes. Let your imagination run wild.

Don't try to be certain about your impressions. Don't try to find out if the ideas you have about this person are right or wrong.

Once you've got an idea of the person in question, imagine that you're in their shoes and that the person you're observing across the table is actually you.

Practise this exercise whenever the opportunity arises. Once you have become familiar with this sitting exercise, vary your walking experiences, choosing people of different ages, sexes and social conditions.

Receiving and paying compliments

Compliments are a very effective way of making a relationship pleasant, solid and deep. It creates a positive atmosphere, considerably improves human relations, shows that you are interested in the other person, improves their confidence and makes the recipient want to do the same, which reinforces your own image. Compliments are nothing more than kind and generous words that, in the end, don't commit you to anything. Give and receive them lightly. If you reject a compliment, it may be because you think you don't deserve it and because you think less of yourself. Refusing a compliment is tantamount to refusing to progress. Conversely, the more you accept your good points, the more ready you are to improve your shortcomings.



Tip:

-When you receive a compliment, say thank you and express your pleasure and your opinion about it. For example, say "I'm pleased to hear you say that, I do think I have that quality".



It's up to you to try:

Consider which of the following prejudices prevent you from paying a compliment:

- ☐ It's normal to do good
- ☐ Accepting a compliment is pride
- ☐ A compliment always has a quid pro quo



You write: *I write the prejudices or beliefs that prevent me from paying a compliment:*

Think of more constructive thoughts that can help you pay a compliment.



It's up to you to write: *I write constructive thoughts that can help me pay a compliment:*



It's your turn to write: *as I respond to the compliments, I notice the improvement in morale:*



It's your turn to write: *here are the compliments I'd like to pay soon:*

Maintaining and caring for the relationship

Your relationship can only evolve if you invest in it with care. Give it time. Even a few minutes a day are enough to cultivate feelings of love.

Knowing how to show your love and tell the other person that you appreciate who they are and what they do helps to create a favourable climate in the relationship or in the couple. It is often routine that extinguishes curiosity, seduction, desire and affection. Habits make us passive and careless, to the point where we no longer make an effort to be genuinely affectionate.

At the same time, we shouldn't expect the other person to guess our feelings. Everyone should try to express their feelings and show the other person that they understand and value them.

Talking about your feelings and confiding in each other is essential to maintaining a lasting relationship. Trust each other and take care of each other. Spare no effort, energy or determination.



Tips and tricks:

We can never proclaim our love for each other enough. Say it on post-it notes! Everyone will be delighted to discover tender words on the breakfast table, the bathroom mirror, the fridge, the pillow... Say it in a letter, a text message or an email.

Take the time to renew your expression of love, to calmly explain your feelings. Say all the good things you think about your loved one and all the things you would like to hear from them.

*Keep **an intimate correspondence notebook**. This will enable you to keep up a regular, sentimental, playful and sensual correspondence within your relationship. It's also a good way of getting an overview of your relationship, because it tells the story of your relationship, its present and its plans for the future. It's not a substitute for the time you spend together, but it's a way of writing down information you don't want to forget, expressing your desires and comparing your impressions. It should be updated regularly with your ideas, confidences and wishes. Sitting down and writing in this notebook gives you time to get in touch with your deepest feelings and decide on the most appropriate words to express them. The advantage of this notebook is that it can stay with you for a lifetime. Intimate and confidential, keep it handy in a secret place, such as your bedroom.*

Overcoming conflict

The ability to overcome conflict, stay in touch with each other and make progress in finding common ground is essential to the longevity of any relationship.

If you find yourself in a conflict situation with your partner, ask him or her to participate with you in finding a solution that is acceptable to both of you. It's up to each of you to propose solutions and evaluate each suggestion objectively until a compromise is reached.

There is no need to convince the other of the right solution once it has been chosen, since both have already accepted it. There is no need to use power to force acceptance, because no one is resisting the decision.



Tip:

In the event of conflict: say "I" rather than "you" and talk about yourself, about what bothers you about the other person's behaviour, as concretely and clearly as possible, without judging, criticising or accusing. By expressing how you feel about this behaviour and the concrete effect it has on you, you are delivering a clear, credible and authentic message.



Your turn to write: *1) I acknowledge the existence of the conflict:*

2) I clearly define the problem:

3) I explore all possible solutions _____

4) I rank them and choose the best _____

5) *I negotiate a fair and reasonable agreement*_____

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

6) I check the results on a set date _____

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Tackle problems as soon as they arise

Direct confrontation with a person is not easy, especially if the solution requires a confrontation where we don't know the outcome.

It's tempting to withdraw and let things go. But problems that are neglected don't go away; on the contrary, they often grow over time. They then become breeding grounds for other problems. It is therefore strongly recommended to resolve problems as they arise.



It's your turn to write: *what problems and tasks do I always put off until tomorrow?*

Making compromises

There are more or less pronounced differences between human beings, due to character, personality, sensitivity, culture, education and so on. Each person is therefore unique, with his or her own experience, rich in events, and his or her own way of expressing emotions.

So there's no point in trying to change anyone. Accepting your partner as they are, with all their differences, and understanding that you can't try to change them, even to make up for a possible feeling of loneliness, is essential to the couple's survival.

The key to getting along despite these differences lies in compromise: accept each other as they are, make mutual efforts, show tolerance and find an arrangement that satisfies everyone.

But be careful not to confuse compromise with concession, which should be avoided because it requires one of the people in the relationship to give up what is important to him or her. This renunciation can also jeopardise the relationship.

Saying no

Don't know how to say NO?

You then attach greater importance to the other person's desires than to your own. However, saying NO is simply rejecting a proposal, not the person making it.

Saying NO is an act of awareness, a clear discernment of what is right or wrong for you. It's essential for marking out your territory in relation to others and protecting your integrity. You shouldn't have to justify saying NO, unless you have to negotiate after a refusal. If the other person insists, express your discomfort while respecting their needs with empathy or seeking a balanced compromise.



It's up to you to try: examine the prejudices that prevent you from saying NO:

- ☐ He (she) will think I'm attacking him
- ☐ I'm going to provoke a conflict
- ☐ I don't have the right to refuse
- ☐ He (she) has to be able to guess my wishes and desires
- ☐ I don't want to sound unpleasant
- ☐ He (she) will think I'm hostile
- ☐ He'll think I'm selfish
- ☐ He (she) is going to make me explain myself

Respect safety distances

We all surround ourselves with a personal safety distance. Being at the right distance means knowing the extent of our inner, intimate and private space, but also knowing and respecting the space of others. It means understanding that one is not the other, but that there is one and the other. Each of us leads our own lives with personal needs and aspirations, and a unique potential to fulfil. If this boundary isn't respected, we get upset. This line of defence is different for each of us, but the more introverted we are, the greater it is. Conversely, extroverts have a smaller distance zone.

As a couple, you need to share common values and be sufficiently compatible to be able to meet positively on a day-to-day basis as well as in major projects. But there will always be differences.

Choosing to live together means accepting that you will have to give up some of your independence to create a shared space for the couple, without forgetting that each of you will need to retain your own personal vital space.

So it's a question of finding a way of getting closer without being hindered by too much proximity.

**Tips and tricks:**

-Consider that the other person can never be taken for granted, so that you can constantly take care of the relationship.

-Carefully explore other people's distances and try to identify the amplitude of your own. This will help you position yourself better.

-To make it last, accept each other's differences, weaknesses and faults without criticising or ridiculing them.

-Try to understand each other's needs.

Regular check-ups

Regularly taking stock of a relationship and assessing each other's expectations is an effective way of making the relationship last.



It's up to you to try:

To help you with this process, here is a list of points to check:

- ☐ We have a common project
- ☐ We agree on our objectives
- ☐ I believe and trust in others
- ☐ I see the other person's weaknesses without criticising them
- ☐ I respect safety distances
- ☐ I can solve my own problems
- ☐ I understand the other person's needs
- ☐ I respect other people as distinct individuals
- ☐ I know how to say no
- ☐ I know how to compromise
- ☐ I deal with problems as soon as they arise
- ☐ I know how to overcome conflict
- ☐ I dare to express what I feel
- ☐ I know how to show interest and affection
- ☐ I feel wanted and loved
- ☐ We know how to talk about money as a couple
- ☐ I've improved my communication techniques
- ☐ I nurture and care for my relationships

- ☐ Maintaining my friendships
- ☐ I understand my partner's sexual expectations
- ☐ I try to make her want to
- ☐ I recognise my role in any dysfunction
- ☐ I dare to assert myself
- ☐ I know how to preserve my need for independence

Prevention is better than cure, and you should take regular stock of these statements. For some relationships, they can prevent failure or break-up.

Record the state of well-being of your relationship or your couple in the notebook below, your compass for good navigation.



Your turn to write: *a well-being diary for my love life or my relationship, Taking stock: Where are we now together? And each of us on our own?*

Come back regularly to take stock of where you are in your relationship life so that you can continue to meet new people and make the most of them. This test is as much about getting to know yourself as it is about your attitudes and abilities to make a success of a meeting and make it happen. In the list that follows, each suggestion begins with a reminder of the chapter relating to the positive affirmation. If this assertion is verified, the corresponding tick box should be coloured green, otherwise red. This list will give you a quick overview of how your relationship life works:

- ☐ **Preparing for the meeting:** *curious and confident, I welcome the unexpected, accept what comes my way, create opportunities...*
- ☐ **Developing good manners:** *being present to others, developing my social intelligence, etc.*
- ☐ **Dare to meet:** *I dare to take initiatives to bring people together...*
- ☐ **Being assertive:** *I trust myself because we all, without exception, have extraordinary potential...*
- ☐ **How to start a conversation:** *I keep things simple and myself when I start a conversation...*
- ☐ **Avoid certain subjects:** *I avoid subjects of little interest on a first meeting...*
- ☐ **Knowing how to listen:** *I'm always interested in what the other person has to say, so I listen...*
- ☐ **Knowing how to decode signs and gestures of love:** *to communicate better, I take into account signs and gestures of love...*
- ☐ **Take your time before making a commitment:** *before I make a commitment, I take some time to think about it...*
- ☐ **Be prepared to make the encounter happen:** *I know that for a relationship to last you have to stimulate it...*

- **Live the relationship in the present:** *at every moment I look at the other person as if it were the first time...*
- **Challenging myself:** *when I make mistakes, I challenge myself...*
- **Open up to others:** *I'm curious about the people I meet...*
- **Learning to talk to each other:** *improving my communication techniques...*
- **Talking about money as a couple:** *I dare to talk about money as a couple...*
- **Enter into an empathic relationship with the other person:** *if the other person is in difficulty, I enter into an empathic relationship with them...*
- **Receiving and paying compliments:** *when someone pays me a compliment, I allow myself to accept it...*
- **Maintaining and caring for the relationship:** *I say all the good things I think about the person I love, I keep our private correspondence book up to date, I show the other person that I value and love them...*
- **Overcoming conflict:** *I propose solutions when I am in conflict with another person...*
- **Solve problems as soon as they arise:** *I know how to solve problems as soon as they arise...*
- **Compromise:** *I accept the other person as they are and I always try to see if compromises are possible...*
- **Saying no:** *I know how to show the other person the limits of my territory that they must not cross...*
- **Respecting safe distances:** *I know how to keep the right distance to respect the other person's privacy...*
- **Keeping an overview:** *I can write down the past, present and future plans for my relationship...*

Encounters, a never-ending story

Every relationship, especially a love relationship, is complex: what happens in it impacts us and upsets us, but we can never understand it in its entirety. The world of dating is so complex and mysterious that it is elusive.

But encounters have meaning. As initiations, they take us back to ourselves and bring about change and transformation. We all aspire to meet new people, but they are very demanding experiences. We derive pleasure and joy from them, but they also confront us with our flaws, our limits, our fears and our imperfections. Because it is from these confrontations that we can effectively enter into communication with the other person.

Whatever the nature of the relationship, above all it highlights who we are. It bears witness to an inner quest, the importance of which we rarely appreciate. If we want to make sense of it, we need to understand its purpose. Where is it leading us? Is it really the destination we want?



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My dating book



This book is a dating guide, a kind of travel diary, a real travel companion, for those who want to record the high points, the updates and the major changes in their friendships, relationships, marriages and professional lives.

The author of this book explores the meaning of encounter in its noblest and broadest sense. He offers us a synthetic and ideal vision of the world of human relationships. He attempts to bring some order to a subject that affects us all. He focuses on the way in which the transition from a chance encounter to an established meeting takes place, and on the dimensions that he believes are fundamental to satisfying and fulfilling encounters.