



# WHAT MEN THINK WOMEN DO WRONG

Are you unwillingly single and wondering why? Psychologist John Aiken outlines five key mistakes women make in relationships – and tells you how to avoid them

**ACCIDENTALLY SINGLE IS A TERM** I use for those single people who find themselves at a certain point in their life wondering “How did this happen to me? It wasn’t meant to work out this way.”

They may have had long-term relationships that have ended, or else have never been able to settle down and commit. Whatever the case, they’re single and frustrated.

I became aware of this problem several years ago while catching up with a friend for coffee. His name was Brad, a single solo father who had moved into the apartment complex I was living in with my then-fiancée Kelly.

He was a tall, athletic guy, loved the outdoors and was a great father to his two gorgeous daughters. I would meet him most Sundays to debrief about his weekend escapades. On one occasion he talked to me about some of the women he had tried to date. He noted that while women tended to pursue him, they would then put up obstacles that made it almost impossible to take the relationship further.

He said several women were still hung up on past relationships or had an ex still involved in their lives. Others worked too much, wanted only a casual relationship or had a cynical or negative attitude to relationships.

Years of talking to men through my psychology practice helped me realise single women often unknowingly make one (or several) of certain key mistakes that hold them back from attracting the right partner. They may say they’re ready to meet someone special but unwittingly they create obstacles that get in the way.

Here are the five most common mistakes that men have described to me, and which get in the way of a lasting relationship. If any of the situations I describe sound familiar to you, then it’s time to make a commitment to change. Become aware of the barriers holding you back and take ownership of your situation.

Follow the steps below and start clearing a path for the right partner to come into your life.

## 1 You’re attracted to unavailable types

This is one of the most common obstacles to finding the best partner for you. It might be that the men you gravitate towards are married or attached, too young or too old, they travel all the time or work too much, they party too hard or they’re only interested in sex.

### How do I overcome it?

**1** Let go: Make a point of letting go of an attachment to anyone who can’t give you a firm commitment. Delete them from your phone, send them a final email or text, and avoid bumping into them.

**2** Recognise the warning signs: Become familiar with what makes someone wrong for you. Think of previous relationships and come up with five key indicators that you’re going to avoid.

**3** Break bad habits: You need to stop allowing unavailable types into your life. Think of the habits and patterns that let

these people in and change your behaviour. Avoid certain venues and locations, reduce your drinking, cut contact with their social networks, or wait a month before sleeping with someone.

**4** Target your ideal partner: Have a clear idea of what you want. Think of all the traits that are important to you and identify five key characteristics that your dream partner possesses. Visualise being with this person for five minutes every day.

**5** Boost your self-worth: To attract someone good into your life, you need to be good to yourself. This means focusing on weekly activities that make you feel great, such as exercise, keeping to a healthy diet, socialising with your friends, pursuing hobbies and interests, and putting aside time for relaxation.

## 2 You’re too clingy

Perhaps you ring and text too often, try to move things forward too quickly (such as meeting their friends and family), ask too many questions and do all the chasing. You may try to please at all costs, lose touch with your family and friends, let go of your interests and hold back on expressing your opinions and values.

### How do I overcome it?

**1** Learn to eliminate: Look at the dating process as one of sorting through rather than rejection. Be proactive and ask people out, accept dates and put yourself out there. Remind yourself this process of trial and error is just eliminating the bad to get to the good.

**2** Create a positive mindset: Any time you have a bad dating experience, it’s easy to become disillusioned. Remember to catch negative thoughts as they’re forming and challenge them with questions like “How can I look at this differently?” and “What advice would I give my best friend if they were in this situation?”

**3** Identify problem dating behaviours: Think about the actions that hold you back and write down the top five dating mistakes you need to avoid. It could be that you are ringing/texting too much, having sex on the first night, drinking too much, pushing too hard to meet their friends, talking about future plans together or expressing intense feelings that can be intimidating.

**4** Create new dating rules: It’s important to be clear about your new approach to dating. Think about what you’re going to do differently and write down your top five new dating rules. For instance, let them ask you questions, hold back on discussing your feelings, and wait four weeks before having sex.

**5** Know when to run: Think about previous relationships you have had that didn’t work out. Identify the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that told you at the time that a person was wrong for you (becoming too clingy if a date becomes distant), and watch out for these signals. If they occur again, step away from the relationship. →

**3 You let drama rule your life**  
A key barrier to finding the one you want is letting drama rule your life. In this case, you'll tend to be the centre of attention, and constantly expect people around you to listen to your problems, drop anything to come and see you, and include you at all times in their life. The focus is always around you and your problems, and you love to complain, make big issues out of everything and seek out advice and reassurance.

**How do I overcome it?**

**1** Solve your problems: It's time to step up and deal with your issues rather than going to others. Whenever you're faced with a problem, turn inwards and ask yourself "What does my instinct tell me?"; "How did I solve this in the past?"; "How can I deal with this on my own?"

**2** Make small decisions privately: Going to people for guidance holds you back and puts others in charge. Make a point of making two small decisions every day, and take the initiative on dates (choose the restaurant or movie, buy the concert tickets, decide on the outfit you wear, or decide on the time you want to be back home).

**3** Stop complaining and ask more questions: It comes easily to you to focus on problems and talk about yourself. Instead, ask your dates questions about themselves, listen and give them time to respond, and focus your conversations on positives rather than problems.

**4** Get a sense of proportion: Being dramatic can see you blow things way out of proportion in the dating game. When things don't go as planned, put events into perspective by asking "What's a different way of viewing this?"; "If this isn't about me, why did it happen?"

**5** Spend time on your own: Constant drama attracts people and makes you the focus of their attention. Force yourself to have time away from others and become comfortable in your own company. Schedule in solo lunches and coffees, do leisure activities on your own and have a month of staying in on Friday nights.

**4 You're too bossy and picky**  
This can see you dish out instructions and criticisms, remind people of their responsibilities, and take the lead on organising everything. You can also come across as being opinionated, rigid and inflexible with your plans. You'll also be too quick to rule out potential love interests because of their mistakes or flaws (which everyone possesses).

**How do I overcome it?**

**1** Stop giving instructions and orders: Telling dates what to do and giving out advice and suggestions is exhausting for you and annoying for them. Hold back on this behaviour and let others be themselves around you.

**2** Embrace personal responsibility: You don't need to take on the role of parent or CEO. Let dates be responsible for themselves, and you'll be surprised at how they step up.

**3** Listen but don't fix: When potential love interests talk about their problems and issues, this is not the time to dish out solutions. Instead, acknowledge their position and let them vent. They'll find this so much more appealing.

**4** Compliment rather than correct: Criticising your date's actions is a sure-fire way to turn that person off. Make a point of giving those around you at least two compliments every time you meet them and avoid commenting on their mistakes. After all, everyone makes them.

**5** Sit back and let others lead: Allow the other person to make plans and take the initiative. You'll be surprised at how organised they can be, and the ideas they'll have.

**5 You have a problem ex**  
A problem ex will have strong feelings for you, push to have frequent contact with you by phone, text and email, rely on you for support, and try to keep in contact with your friends and family. They may also continue to use loving names for you, or hang out in places where they know they'll bump into you.

**How do I overcome it?**

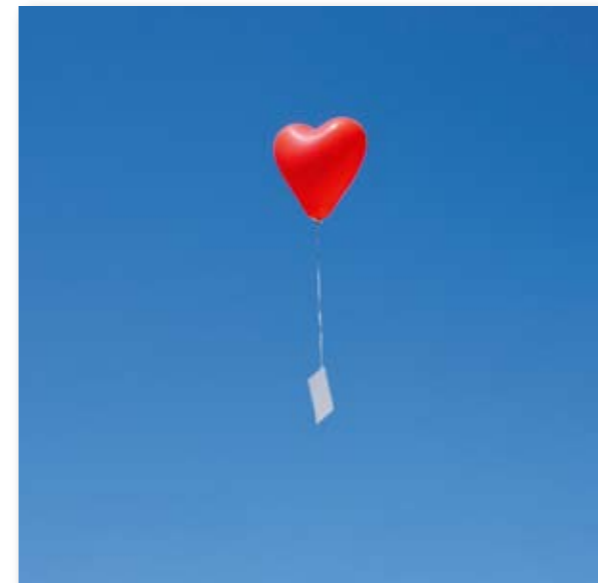
**1** Get honest with your ex: Highlight the different feelings you have for each other. Ask "Are you still in love with me?" and "How do you feel if I go out with someone else?", and let them know that the chemistry is not there for you.

**2** Help them move on: Take some time to go over with them what happened in the break-up. Make it clear why you're not meant to be together any more and avoid any mixed messages.

**3** Create new friendship rules: If you're both prepared to try a new friendship with each other, then it's time to outline your expectations. This needs to cover the behaviours you want changed and the type of contact you expect to have in the future. When there are children involved you'll need to come to a specific agreement about ongoing contact with your ex. In this case, the most important thing is to consider the children and how this situation impacts on them. Be consistent with household rules and boundaries, avoid putting each other down or fighting in front of your children, come to an understanding about how to handle introducing new partners, and stick to plans and promises. Respect each person's privacy and their right to a new life, and try to make family gatherings as positive as possible.

**4** Rely on other people: Going to your ex during times of crisis or uncertainty has to stop as this encourages them to hold on to hope of a reconciliation. Instead, make a list of five key people you're going to contact when you need advice, support and assistance.

**5** Stop trying to save your ex: Feeling guilty about the break-up and hurting their feelings may see you constantly trying to help them out. However, this only gives them hope and keeps them involved in your life. Encourage them to go elsewhere for support and tell them you can no longer fill this role for them.



#### OTHER THINGS THAT KEEP YOU SINGLE

● **You're hung up on past relationships**

Constantly dwelling on your past relationships keeps you single. You fixate on what could have been; you try to remain in contact with your exes, hanging on to the hope of rekindling your romance. You may be guilty of keeping in contact with their friends and family, and turning down new opportunities to see other people.

● **You have a negative attitude**

If you generally carry around a cynical, gloomy mindset, this turns people off. You may complain about past disappointments, hold grudges and dwell on life's unfairness. You tend to focus on problems and difficulties, put yourself down in public, and often speak about the future in a bleak and disempowering way. Others may describe you as bitter, prickly and pessimistic.

● **You have friends who hold you back**

In this instance, your friends become the major barrier to attracting the right partner. They may drink too much, only be keen on one-night stands, or engage in risk-taking behaviour (such as drugs). They might bully you, drain you with their neediness, put you down or sabotage your efforts to meet someone special.

● **You're only into casual relationships**

Your tendency to only engage in casual liaisons becomes the major obstacle to finding your ideal partner. This sees you prioritise physical connections with strangers above potential long-term relationships, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies, health problems and feelings of loneliness and emptiness. It can also result in giving you a bad reputation, and sends a signal that you're only interested in fun and pleasing yourself.

● **You put exercise before romance**

Perhaps you put all your energy and attention into fitness and health instead of meeting someone special.

Your days are taken up with rigid exercise routines, strict eating plans and obsessing about weight and body image. Your time is structured and planned, there's no spontaneity and people must fit in with your schedule.

● **You can't sort your life out**

If your life is a disorganised mess, it keeps potential love interests at bay. This causes you to constantly run late, live in a state of disorder and be forgetful. Others around you will parent you by giving instructions and advice, reminding you of your responsibilities and picking up after you. You avoid taking the lead or initiating anything, and you rely on other people to help you cope.

● **You put work before love**

Prioritising your career instead of your personal life drives away potential partners. Perhaps you work late at the office, go in during the weekends and are a slave to your mobile phone and computer. You have a bad habit of standing people up and re-scheduling appointments due to work responsibilities; you talk about work all the time, and have little time for socialising or holidays.

● **You're too nice and can't say 'no'**

You try to please other people so much that love interests find you boring and move on. You hate conflict and struggle to put yourself and your needs first; this results in you trying to be someone you're not. You say yes instead of no, hold back your opinions, look to others for guidance and advice, and let people walk over you. Being a peacemaker and someone who loves to be loved, you agree with everyone and follow rather than lead.

● **You have over-involved parents**

The people who raised you can be the major reason you're still single. They may be controlling and expect you to meet their expectations and obey their rules. On the other hand, they may be needy to the extent where you have to run around after them, put them ahead of others and spend your time caring for them. Whatever the case, your relationship with them currently prevents you from pursuing romantic opportunities.

● **You neglect your appearance**

You ignore your wellbeing to the point where you are no longer attractive to others. You may be underweight or overweight, drink too much, wear old, tired clothes, or have stopped exercising. An unhealthy diet, lack of sleep, or not presenting yourself confidently and smartly to the outside world can strongly influence how potential love interests see you. ☐

John Aiken's book *Accidentally Single: 15 Mistakes That Ruin Romance – And How to Avoid Them* is available from February 1 (Penguin, \$30).

