

Boundaries In Dating Part III

"Dealing with Blame, False Hope and Disrespect in Relationships"

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, Boundaries In Dating (Zondervan 2000)

Blame began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when Adam told God it was Eve's fault that he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree and Eve said that the Devil made her do it. Neither one took responsibility for their actions.

Genesis 3:9, 11-13 "Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" And He said "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (NKJ)

People often look to place blame (fault) for their problems on others. What we should do first is pray about the situation then ask ourselves if we are in anyway responsible for the circumstances. We should pray for wisdom and understanding and this will bring God's perspective into the situation. If we pray before we act or speak, things might look differently to us.

Guidelines to cure the blame problem

- Become Self-Scrutinizing: "Blame problems tend to lessen when we are pointing the finger at ourselves first." Id. at 212
Psalms 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me." (NLT)
- Relate to both the good and the bad of your date: "It is hard to maintain a blaming stance if you keep the good parts of your date in mind as much as you do the bad parts." Id. at 213
- Set boundaries instead of blaming: "It is much more helpful to confront your date in love, let him know what you will not tolerate, and set limits if the behavior continues." Id. at 213
Ephesians 4:14-15 "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ." (NKJ)
- Forgive: "Another reason people continually blame is that they have difficulty forgiving their date...it is important to remember that we have a Savior who has forgiven us at the deepest level, and who requires us to let go of the demand for revenge or perfect justice just as He did for us." Id. at 213-214
Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (NKJ)
- Grieve: When we cancel a debt, we are letting go of the right to demand revenge. That letting go brings loss and a feeling of sadness.

Dealing with False Hope

Once we become emotionally involved with someone it is very hard to accurately assess the relationship. It's possible that one person may think very differently from the other regarding the direction the relationship is moving in. For example, one person may be happy with just a friendship while the other may be looking for more of a commitment. We need to guard our hearts as we prayerfully try to discover the direction the relationship is moving in.

How to avoid getting caught in the trap of 'false hope'

First: Steps for you to take

- Learn how to hear from God through prayer, reading the scriptures and quietly waiting on God to speak to you.
John 10:4 "... and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (NKJ)
- Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to you.
Psalm 91:4 "His truth shall be your shield and buckler." (NKJ)
- Open your heart and mind to the will of God.
Psalm 37:23 "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."
- Step back and try to look at the relationship objectively. Be honest with yourself and don't deny the facts.
Psalm 51:6 "But you desire honesty from the heart, so you can teach me to be wise in my inmost being." (NLT)
- Ask for guidance from trusted friends and/or counselors.
Proverbs 11:14 "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety." (NKJ)

Second: Steps to take together

Talk to your date about your feelings.

- If you have been 'just friends' and now want to move into a more serious dating relationship you should tell the person how you feel. This does not mean you should express every last detail of your emotional feelings for the person. But with grace and poise explain that you are interested in moving to another level in your relationship.
- Ask if they feel the same way toward you. If they do not, you need to take some definitive actions.
- If they are not sure about their feelings toward you, it might be a good idea to pull back from spending time together, allowing them, and you, a chance to rethink the situation. They may need more time to develop 'real' feelings for you, or maybe it's not the right time for them because of personal circumstances, or it could be that they do really want to remain 'just friends'.
- In any event, it may be difficult to discern the truth when you are so emotionally involved. Stepping back from the situation can bring a fresh perspective.
- Whatever you do don't allow false hope to cause you to become content with the status quo. You deserve more than that in life.

Do not tolerate Disrespect

“Respect is a necessary element for any couple to grow in love. Each person needs to feel that they are respected by the person they are getting to know. This involves having esteem or regard for all aspects of the other.” *Id.* at 221-222

This does not mean that you have to agree with everything they say or do, but you must show respect for their feelings and personhood.

How Disrespect Happens

“...The other person’s feelings, freedom, or needs get trampled or ignored because of how intent their date is in having their own way.” *Id.* at 223

- Dominating: They won’t take no for an answer.
- Withdrawal: They sulk, give the silent treatment, or pull away.
- Manipulating: They use tactics such as crying and guilt to get their way.
- Minimizing: They say the other person is just overreacting.
- Rationalizing: Put the blame on circumstances, rather than accept responsibility for their actions.

How to cure disrespect

- “Don’t wait to deal with it. The longer you wait to address disrespect, the more you can expect it. Nip it in the bud.
- Get to know your date in the context of other relationships. Observe their interaction with family members and friends.
- Say no...a simple test of disrespect is to disagree about a preference and see what happens.
- Be specific as to what bothers you and why.
- Own your own part...have you ignored this behavior or treated it lightly?
- Take ownership of the issue. Change what you need to change.” *Id.* at 229-231

To sum things up . . . blame, false hope and disrespect are character weaknesses which may appear in your dating relationship at any given time. However, the defining question is, to what extent do they appear? If you are in a dating relationship where these problems are very common, you need to stop and deal with them and seek counsel if needed, before going forward with the relationship.

God loves you and His desire is that your life would be blessed.

Psalm 103:2-5 “Bless (affectionately, gratefully praise) the Lord, O my soul, and forget not [one of] all His benefits, Who forgives [every one of] all your iniquities, Who heals [each one of] all your diseases, Who redeems your life from the pit and corruption, Who beautifies, dignifies, and crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercy; Who satisfies your mouth [your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation] with good so that your youth, renewed, is like the eagle’s [strong, overcoming, soaring]!”
(AMP)

Questions:

1. Under the “Guidelines to cure the blame problem” it was stated that we should ‘relate to both the good and the bad of your date’ how could we do this effectively without tolerating unacceptable behavior?
2. How can you avoid getting caught in the trap of ‘false hope’ in your dating relationship?
3. Talking to your date about your feelings for them can be a risky, but necessary step. What is the best way to avoid getting caught in a dead end relationship?
4. Each person needs to feel that they are respected by the person they are getting to know. How does disrespect show itself and what can we do about it?