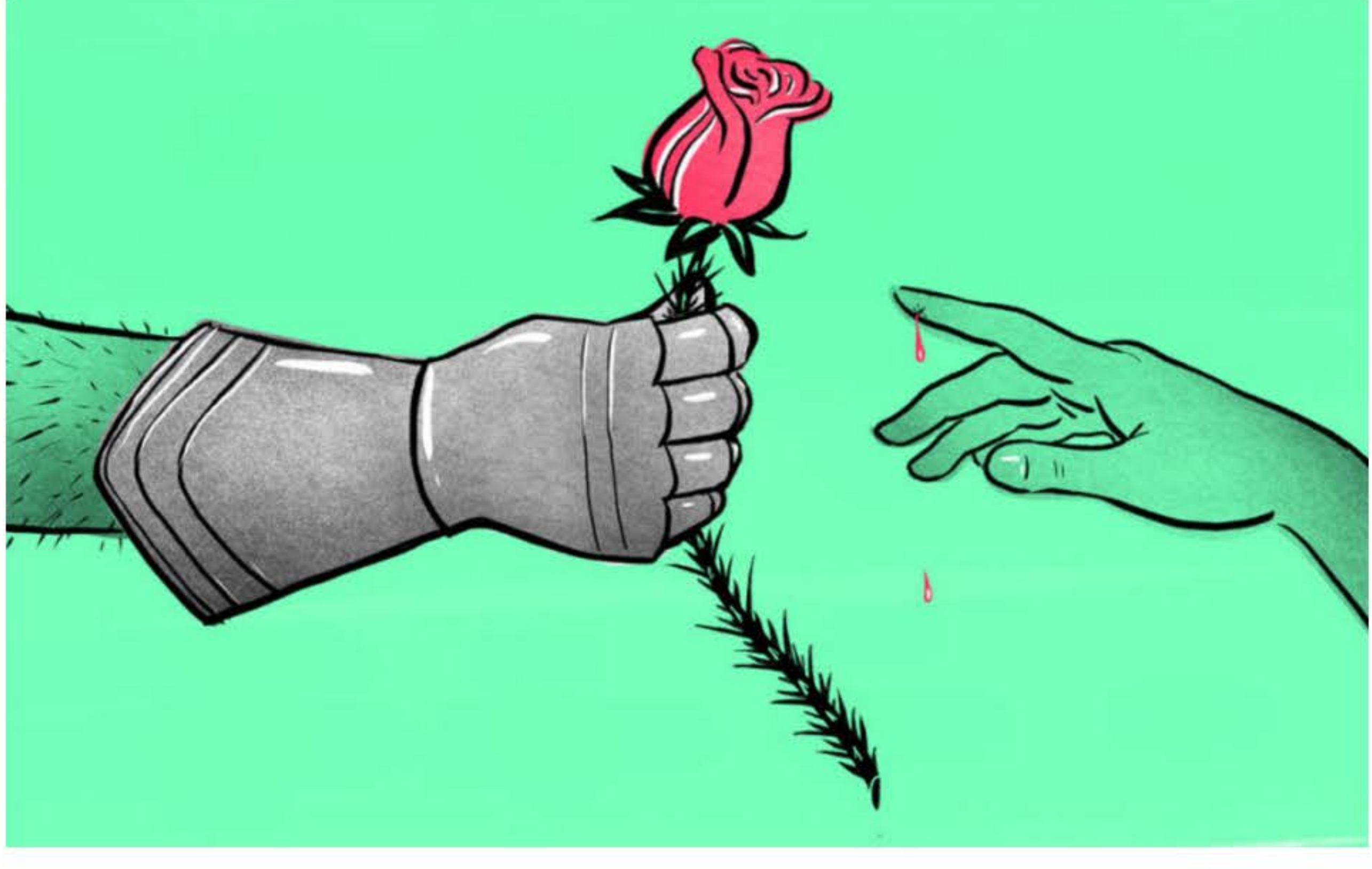


How To Date Casually Without Hurting Anyone

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4/23/15 2:35pm - Filed to: DATING

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So, you’ve decided to start dating. But instead of diving headlong into a committed monogamous partnership—or one of those polyamorous ones that’s really more about booty-calling whoever’s around—you’re going to *date casually*. Which is to say, an ongoing but uncommitted relationship wherein the parties involved actively choose a lower-stakes relationship. The caveat is that neither party is entitled to substantial emotional support or exclusivity from the other.

This is great for people who are terrible at long-term things or just not ready for a new one. If you’ve too recently been in a relationship that lasted long and ended amicably enough that you still go fishing with your ex’s brother—or keep forgetting that farting audibly in front of a date is unacceptable—this is probably a good way to test the water and get back out there. It’s best not to jump into anything serious too quickly after the kind of devastation that leaves you that gassy afterwards, anyways. But now that you’re considering dating again (sort of), let’s figure out how to do so tactfully, shall we? The thing is, lots of people think “dating casually” and its inherent lack of a commitment means they can be psychopathically insensitive to the feelings of others (woo!). This is not a good look. Don’t do it.

The reason that casual dating is so hard for many people is because, well, isn’t the whole point of first, second, or third dates that they’re casual? Generally, there are two types of casual daters: Those who are potentially interested in something more but open to going with the flow at the start, and those who aren’t looking for anything past what you’re doing right now. The former might fuck up by assuming that “casual” means “easily disposable,” while the latter could fuck up by failing to communicate that they really, truly, don’t want anything serious.

Sometimes, the latter are commitment phobic or delusional. (No, Scarlett Johansson is *not* just moments away from coming to her senses and dating you. Yes, you should consider dating the perfectly lovely social-media manager in tasteful separates.) Other times, they are just clueless about what this entails. For how simple it should be, there are many ways to accidentally fuck up this process and blow your chance at more blow jobs or, even worse, realize too late that she was Your Person. Luckily for you, the more egregious mistakes mostly fall into three major categories that I’ll discuss below. Don’t worry: If it doesn’t work out after all that, we’ll get to how to end casual relationships without being a pile of sentient diarrhea.

What is “casual dating,” exactly?

In short, casual dating entails going out with, sleeping with, and having a connection to and respect for a person without committing to a relationship with them. Unfortunately, some kind of a bearded serpent in the 1960s decided that labeling things was oppressing them, or something, and it magically became virtuous to not label relationships. (“That’s what squares do!” or some other free-love bullshit.) The hippie that did it was garbage and just didn’t want to have to get business cards. Labeling things is fine, even if the label is just “casual.” It is okay to want to date casually, but you have to make it clear that, should the person you’re dating want more while you don’t, they’re free to look elsewhere.

I emphasize this because a great deal of casual dating happens when one party is not even privy to the fact that the other wants their situation to stay casual in perpetuity. The offending party manages to prolong the affair by saying things like, “Let’s see where it goes,” when they have no intention of seeing it actually go anywhere beyond where it is. But they’re either afraid of saying so because they think it will hurt the person’s feelings, or afraid that they’ll get dumped once their intentions become obvious.

These are both spineless reasons to not say that you want to be and remain casual. You shouldn’t be casually dating someone without their consent. These numbers aren’t in the Bible or anything, but you should have “the talk” according to any of these three different measures: 1) After at least five dates ended in sex, 2) after dating has been ongoing for eight weeks, or 3) after you’ve had three sleepovers that ended in making breakfast for each other the next morning. (Because that shit is serious, okay?) More importantly, you must always demonstrate that you want things to be casual by not giving off Boyfriend Vibes, which brings me to my next point.

Treat your casual dating partner with respect. Be nice.

The thing that differentiates a casual dating relationship from a formal one is *not* that you get to shirk all responsibility to communicate like a human being just because things are non-exclusive. This doesn’t mean you have to send your special friend an emoji parade of feelings to their phone all day every day, but you also don’t get to just ignore them either. It’s not a matter of women being needy, it’s that it is so totally fucking easy to just text someone that you’re busy! People who can’t handle simple communication are the same kind of butt blisters who ignore texts for hours or days and yet will call upon the woman he is casually dating in a time of emotional distress. But it is unfair to treat a woman with less courtesy than you do your regular friends, only to rely on her during an illness in the family or a moment of professional uncertainty. Seeking women’s emotional intimacy and support while not committing to other basic courtesies sends mixed signals about your level of care for her.

“But what if I just want her support as a friend?” someone might ask, incredulous. First of all, once you start dickin’ her, you forfeit a lot of the benefits of friendship. Sorry, I don’t make the rules, I am just the shrill messenger here to remind you that your dick got in the way of your friendship. Secondly, that is what regular friends are for!

Casual dating is not the same as a booty call.

I am a card-carrying member of the “U up?” club: the kind of person who likes to send text messages at all unholy hours summoning men to my chambers for all the joys of carnal knowledge without having to do annoying things like put on pants or venture outside. But a booty call must be for the purpose of sex and sex only. There can be uproarious laughter and merrymaking, but it needs to be devoid of any sort of romantic dimension. I was recently made aware of some sort of deranged lunatic who invited his booty call over to sit by a fire late at night and only *then* proceed to bang. Like, was there a bearskin rug, too? A rose between his teeth? Honestly, I hope she went if only to push him into the fire for cavalierly mixing cheeseball romantic moves with the pure and unadulterated joy of uncommitted time in each other’s bone zones.

Casual dating is not just casual fucking. It can turn into that, sure, but you can’t just bait and switch. So when you’re casually dating someone, don’t treat her like a booty call that just happens to come over during the day and go out with you sometimes. If you invite her over and she isn’t clearly immediately there to get her fuck on, you better be damn ready to sit through at least one installment of *The Fast and the Furious* franchise before trying to bang her. You can touch her butt when Vin and Michelle are getting all handsy on those Honda Civics to see if she wants to skip the show for indulging in *night ways*, but if she wants to finish the whole movie, cool your jets!

Even casual relationships have rules on how to end them.

The first rule of ending casual relationships is that *you have to end casual relationships*. There are too many people that just choose to stop responding to text messages to end things. Those people are weasels that eat trash and wet popcorn and deserve to be set adrift on ice floes and left to the mercies of the deep ocean. Don’t be one of them. Just say, “I had a lot of fun, but I think this has run its course,” or something to that effect that makes clear that you’re done. If you have followed all of the other instructions above and the damsel in question knows that this was always casual, then you don’t really owe each other much beyond the closure of a breakup. Don’t give or ask for detailed explanations of why it didn’t work out; pushing the matter just prolongs the humiliation. This isn’t a huge breakup. This was casual.

If you have been clear about your intentions and kind but non-committal, ending things can and should be simple. So do yourself a favor in advance and don’t pretend you’re casually dating someone just because you want all of the benefits of a relationship without the attendant emotional labor. If you want to be emotionally reliant on someone, you can’t let their texts go unanswered or only call after midnight from a bear-skin rug. You can’t just have your audible farts and eat them, too.