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Approaching a Potential Love Interest IRL: How to Get More Comfortable



Adam England

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Thomas Barwick / Verywell Mind

For many of us, swiping through dating apps is just another thing we've come to expect from modern life. Whether we're absent-mindedly swiping through Tinder while waiting for friends or carefully curating our Hinge profiles, [dating apps](#) have, perhaps unfortunately, become the norm when it comes to looking for love.

Combine the sharp rise of dating apps with the pandemic restrictions of the last few years, and it's easy to see why more people are looking for love online. That being said, an increasing number of people are growing tired of the drawbacks inherent to online dating, but don't really know how to switch back to meeting people IRL. So what is a single person to do?

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Approaching a Romantic Interest in Person

Research by [The Inner Circle](#) suggested that over three-quarters (76%) of people are open to being approached by a potential date in real life, but it's rare that people will make the first move themselves.

"When it comes to making a connection, attempting to do so in person can seem like a very stressful and challenging situation," says Maria Sullivan, dating expert and Vice President of [Dating.com](#). "Due to the pandemic, many singles became comfortable with the idea of connecting or "shooting their shot" on dating apps or on social media. Now, as more and more singles are looking to make in-person connections, flirting face to face with a connection is something many may not have done recently."

Some people might struggle in person due to the [fear of rejection](#)—after all, somebody rejecting you to your face is going to be more difficult to deal with than somebody not matching you back in a dating app. And, because people might be worried about coming across as creepy or making others uncomfortable—particularly with the rise of #MeToo and similar movements, some people may not be sure as to the correct etiquette.

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And then there's the fact that in public people are often on their phones or otherwise preoccupied. It might be difficult to meet someone on the subway during your commute in the morning, for example, particularly if people are busy checking emails or simply want a few minutes of alone time before starting the day.

You might have better luck at something like a concert, where there's already a guaranteed mutual interest in something, or at a bar or club, where people will expect to be approached.

Related: [How to Start a Conversation](#)

The Art of Flirting

[Georgina Vass](#), a qualified relationships and sex therapist, describes the main five [flirting](#) styles: physical, traditional, sincere, polite, and playful.

"Being aware of your style can help you succeed in finding a partner," she says. "Due to the variety of styles, it's difficult to prescribe a one-size-fits-all for flirting, or avoiding discomfort beyond increased self-awareness and investigating the nonverbal and verbal behaviors linked to each style. Also, it's important to remember that everyone has a different version of what discomfort means to them!"

As she says, there's no one answer to the question of how to flirt. Different people will appreciate different styles, and you've got no way of knowing for sure which style somebody will like.

Regardless, Sullivan recommends always being yourself, and asking meaningful questions too. "While it's important to share information about yourself, don't forget to ask questions that will allow you to learn more about the other person and listen to the answers to show that you're interested in learning more," she explains.

If you're feeling anxious about flirting, which is understandable, [tools we use for anxiety](#) in general can help—Vass mentions exercise, calming breathing techniques, and mindfulness exercises.

So, if you want to approach people yourself, what can you do? Vass mentions three important factors that researchers found: good non-verbal behavior, proceeding gently, and being clever.

"With this in mind, I would recommend good eye contact, smiling, and confident posture. Other factors identified in that study suggest that showing sweetness, staying upbeat, and finding some common ground also lead to effective flirting," says Vass.

"If you're still reluctant to flirt in person, just remember that if you do the same thing, you're likely to get the same result. Make a change keeping these techniques in mind, and the outcome will probably be way better than what you originally feared."

And, practice! "Flirting is a skill that can be learned and practiced," says Chris Pleines, dating expert from [Datingscout.com](#). "Try to act flirty in front of a mirror, or imagine you are talking to someone you like. You may create a script and practice in your safe space."

Non-verbal cues can be useful when meeting people in public, particularly in places where most people might be reading the newspaper or scrolling social media. Stay in the moment and focus on your surroundings – if anyone else is doing the same you might be able to engage with them.

And again, it depends on the person. Women and older people found a gentle approach to be more effective, whereas younger men prioritized good looks.

Related: [Why Flirting Is Good for Your Mental Health](#)

Politeness and Respect Are Key

"While approaching someone in person, being as polite as possible is key," says Sullivan. "If the other person does seem interested in [striking up a conversation](#), try to start off by addressing something happening in the current situation, such as your thoughts on the bar you're both at.

"This allows for an easy opening for the other person to contribute to the conversation, which can lead to further interaction. Asking for a phone number during this initial interaction is okay, but be sure not to do so too early. This should be done only if the conversation went well and the other person seems interested so that you have the opportunity to continue to get to know one another."

Of course, it should go without saying that it's important to take 'no' for an answer. If someone isn't interested, it's not an invitation to probe further. There's nothing inherently creepy or predatory about approaching someone, but it's important to respect their wishes if they aren't interested," says Sullivan.

Start with good intentions. Nothing beats a nice person with genuine interests.

Sullivan continues, "If the person you're approaching indicates that they are not interested in talking, do not continue to try and strike up a conversation. Persistence in a situation like this can be interpreted as a "creepy" or uncomfortable interaction."

"Start with good intentions. Nothing beats a nice person with genuine interests," says Pleines. This is good advice to follow—sure, it might not work out, but if you take rejection on the chin and move on, you'll be better placed to approach the next person.

Okay, so maybe you won't end up marrying the first person you approach in real life. But you could say the same about the first person you match with on Tinder. You might have to deal with rejection, but it shouldn't leave you disheartened. Rather, treat it as a learning curve.

Dating can be a minefield, whether it's online or in person. But practice can help you improve in confidence, as can ensuring that you pick the most appropriate time and place to approach somebody. And above all, respect the other person whether or not they're interested – there's no harm in asking, but don't be persistent.

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