

Unattached singles brace for Valentine's Day

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By APRIL KINSER / DallasNews.com

Come Monday, Yvette Peterson will be surrounded by roses, tulips and lilies, but don't expect her to be thrilled. The 26-year-old single mom views Valentine's Day as just another workday – albeit a very busy one – at The Flower Mart on Oak Lawn. "I'll probably just go home and have dinner with my little girl," Peterson said.

As millions of people await bouquets, candlelight dinners and romantic nights out on the town, singles like Peterson are preparing for solitude. Of the more than 97 million single men and women in the United States, more than 450,000 live in Dallas, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

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A recent Match.com survey of more than 1,200 people identified Valentine's Day as the hardest day to celebrate as a single person, even more than Christmas or New Year's Eve.

"There is so much awareness as a single person. You walk into any store this time of year and all you see is pink and red and chocolate hearts," said Kathleen Roldan, a spokeswoman for the Richardson-based site. "I do think that adds to the stress."

Roldan said singles panicked about their lack of a relationship make the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day some of the company's busiest.

But other singles head in the opposite direction, creating sites devoted to anti-Valentine's Day sentiment.

One states that the holiday "tortures the couple-less and fattens (the) pockets of flower peddlers and greeting card companies. Everywhere you look, there (are) disgusting mixtures of red and pink. God, I hate pink."

Another site sums up the day as a "socially constructed concept created by mad scientists for the express purpose of adding stress that takes an additional three to four years off your life expectancy."

Dallas resident Tim Berry, 23, said he's still getting used to the idea that Monday would be his first Valentine's Day alone. "I had a friend invite me to go out with his girlfriend and another couple, but I thought that wouldn't be such a great idea," Berry said. "I'm OK with being single, but it's kind of different not to have anyone to hang out with during that time." Berry said he would probably watch sports on TV. "I hope there's a Mavericks game on," he said.

Nina Atwood, a Dallas-based singles coach and author of *Soul Talk: Powerful, Positive Communication for a Loving Partnership*, said Valentine's Day can be particularly difficult for women.

"For single women longing for a relationship that hasn't happened, they want to scream when they see a bunch of pink and red Hallmark cards. ... But Valentine's Day shouldn't be an excuse to feel sorry for yourself," Atwood said. "Use the day to look at happy couples around you and validate that love can be good."

Dr. Karen Prager, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Dallas, said people who are not single voluntarily might experience great feelings of sadness and loneliness on Feb. 14.

"Some can wonder what's wrong with them and why no one has chosen them," Prager said. "They are angry and sad and have self-doubts because it hasn't happened for them." But being single doesn't mean you have to be sad and alone Monday, she said.

"I think it's wonderful to celebrate friendships on Valentine's Day. Get people together and make plans to do something special," Prager said. "Just because you're not in a relationship doesn't mean you don't have love in your life."

Atwood suggested buying or making Valentine's Day affirmations or going out with friends and passing out candy. "I think it's really easy to find things to be resentful or petty about," Atwood said. "When I have been single, though, I've always tried to behave or interact in a way I thought would be attractive."

Other ways to ease the distress of being single on Valentine's Day, suggests eHow.com, are to send yourself flowers, treat yourself to a luxury like a massage or expensive lunch, or invite a single friend over for a dinner party and champagne.

Prager said singles should remember that Valentine's Day should be a time to celebrate love in all forms, not just a romantic relationship. "The best thing to do is to use it as an excuse to reach out and make someone happy," Prager said. "You don't have to beat up yourself on Valentine's Day because you're not in a relationship."

Peterson said she plans to buy her 5-year-old daughter flowers and let her know how much she loves her. "I'll probably buy myself flowers, too," she said. "People don't have to be depressed on Valentine's Day. I'm glad I'm single."

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