

Be Your Own Dating Service



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*A Step-by-Step Guide to
Finding and Maintaining Healthy Relationships*



Nina Atwood

AN OWL BOOK
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*This book is dedicated
to the memory of my mother, Jean Alden,
with gratitude for her example of
unconditional love.*



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Introduction



Welcome to the world of modern dating! Whether you're newly divorced or you've been single for years, you've no doubt discovered the challenges of finding the right partner and creating a healthy, lasting relationship.

As a single person myself, I am acutely aware of how difficult this is. When I first conceived of writing a book like this, I began my research as much for myself as for my clients and future readers. I, too, wanted to know how to make dating a more rewarding experience and move myself closer to a healthy relationship.

Whenever I talk to groups of singles and field their questions, I hear the same ones over and over:

"Where are all the nice people to date? Where do you go to meet the right people?" and "Why is love so hard to find? Why are relationships so difficult?"

These questions reveal the problems that singles have in today's dating scene:

1. Not enough choice—the sense that there aren't enough people to choose from.

2. When we do meet someone new, we move too quickly into a relationship without a proper assessment of what the possibility is, and without good boundaries. Thus:

3. We get our hearts broken, often unnecessarily; we get discouraged, become cynical, and withdraw from the dating scene, sometimes for months or years, sometimes permanently, or,

4. We stay too long with the wrong partners, fearful of never finding anything better.

Given all the challenges, it's amazing that so many of us hang in there and continue to play the dating game. We do this for one simple reason: *the drive to connect in a meaningful way with a romantic partner is very powerful and not to be denied*. We try and try again, even though the problems sometimes seem insurmountable.

After a few years of being single, we begin to feel the urgent need for solutions. We go to workshops, we buy self-help books, we even go into therapy. We join dating services, thinking that this will be the answer.

Dating services provide introductions to other singles, but they do nothing to help us understand how to create good relationships. Most self-help books for singles offer advice on attracting and winning over partners, which is fine as long as you're content with just any old relationship.

If you're like me and like the singles I talk to and work with, you want more than that: *You want a compatible partner with whom you can create a loving, healthy, lifetime relationship*. This means that you'll need more than just tips on meeting, flirting, and winning people over.

This book is about healthy relationships and how to create them from the beginning. I view single life as an incredible opportunity: the perfect time to step back, take a new look at how we're going about the dating game, and learn about relationships *prior to getting into one*. Being single can be a powerful intervention point in getting the kind of healthy love we want.

This book offers solutions, but not with a particular result in mind. Instead of recipes for attracting and winning over a desired

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partner, this book provides steps that lay the foundation for healthy relationships.

Instead of an answer book, this book is more like an exercise book. Rather than saying, "Do this, do that, and you'll get the person you want," this book says, "Practice this, practice that, and you'll know yourself better, create a more rewarding life, and move yourself closer to a healthy love relationship in the process."

This book is actually a philosophy of dating designed to empower singles in their search for the right partner, so that they: 1) have more choices; 2) make better choices; and 3) thereby create healthier relationships that have a good chance of lasting. It doesn't offer any guarantees or magical solutions.

Instead, this book asks you to look at how you're going about the dating game, to examine your attitudes and views, and to make changes at the very heart of your approach to finding a partner. You will design and create your own personal "Dating Game Plan," customized to fit your personality, your needs, and your lifestyle. You will make a new assessment of what kind of partner you're looking for. Most important, you'll have the opportunity to use this plan for your own personal growth in every area of your life and in all your relationships.