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Ready for Valentine's Day? If not, she can help

A love expert talks about good relationships.

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You don't want to tell Julia Bendis that matchmaking is a profession of the past.

Bendis grew up watching her grandmother and mother set people up. She started following in their footsteps when she was in high school.

She turned it into a career five years ago with her business, Match by Julia.

The Rancho Santa Margarita resident said she has matched hundreds of couples and advised them on dating and relationships.

She sat down with the Rancho Canyon News to talk about her profession and relationship tips for Valentine's Day.

Q. Who's your typical client?

A. A typical client is 35 to 45 years old, no kids, never married, got a great career, middle class, educated.

Q. Why do they come to you?

A. No. 1 is they are busy. They travel for work a lot. They truly hate the whole singles scene – the bar scene – and they don't have time for it. And they don't have time to sit and search and scour through hundreds of profiles. They want a personal touch.

Q. How did the Internet change the art of matchmaking?

A. It's a lot easier to see who's out there. You can sit there and look at the pictures and the profiles instead of meeting the people in person, going to bars, going to clubs, going to different events that require you actually getting out of the house. ... In that respect, online dating has been



TOMOYA SHIMURA, STAFF Matchmaker and dating coach Julia Bendis offers timely tips.

a great tool. The issue with online dating is you don't really know who you are going to get. People post pictures from 10 years ago when they were a lot thinner, a lot younger.

Q. How do you spot the chemistry with people?

A. It's not just one or two things – having similar background, having similar interests, having similar lifestyle and what they are looking for from the partner. If you are into jumping off cliffs every weekend and the other person is into just taking a walk by the beach, that's not a great match.

Q. What are popular traits people look for in a partner?

A. The biggest thing I hear is “normal” – someone normal, someone down to earth, who has the same interests, who wants a family, who wants to settle down.

I think we are all, in a way, a little strange. We all have our quirks, things that we do that may annoy someone else or may seem strange to another person.

It's just a matter of what you are OK with and what you are not willing to accept.

Q. Tell me three things you can do on your own to find the right partner.

A. Put your phone down. You have to stop looking at your phone every time you are out in public because you will never meet anyone staring at your phone, reading your emails. Look around, talk to people. You don't need a great pickup line. Just go up to someone and introduce yourself.

Do something you normally wouldn't do. Instead of maybe going to a bar, take a class or join clubs – hiking, biking, surfing – whatever it is you've ever wanted to do.

Don't be so focused that it's Valentine's Day and you are single. Who cares? It's just another day. Get some girlfriends together and go out. There are probably the same amount of men out there who are single who hate this holiday also.

Q. Three things to avoid on a first date?

A. Stay away from topics like politics, religion and your ex. Nobody wants to sit across from someone and listen to how much of a pain your ex was or what she did for you.

No sex on the first date no matter how old or young you are. You want to get to know the person before you jump into bed with them. ... You start having emotions and feelings that you shouldn't have so soon. You want to work up to that.

Make sure you never schedule a date right after work. Always give yourself time to go home and change, take a shower. You'll be surprised how many people I have to tell that to. Smelling good is the key.

Q. So what should one do?

A. Just be open-minded and talking, and not be shy and reserved. You've got to be engaging and not talk about yourself unless they ask you about yourself. Ask questions because you are

there to learn about that person.

Don't come into it thinking like this has to work. Think of it as you are just going to meet with a coworker or a friend, just a friendly, casual encounter.

Don't put too much pressure that this has to work and this has to turn into something. If nothing else, you gain a friend. That person may not be good for you, but they may know someone else that is.

Q. What should people avoid giving on Valentine's Day?

A. Stay away from household appliances. I would stay away from things that are not personal, like a camera or a television. It should be something very personal. A new bouquet of roses is enough, or planning a romantic dinner or a night out, an overnight trip somewhere.

If you are just starting with the person and spending the first Valentine's Day together, a safe bet is flowers, something romantic. You can't go wrong with jewelry for women. For men, I would say a handwritten card with a box of chocolates or something personal.

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