

# DATING STAGES: Where are you?

By Christine Kniffen, LCSW

When it comes to dating it is important to think about it in the context of various stages in order to have less disappointment and a better rate of success. Disappointment often ensues when two people meet and have very different ideas about what they are looking for at this particular point in their life. The three main stages one could be in when thinking about relationships include *single*, *just dating* and *committed*. It is important to accurately identify what stage you are in, gain an understanding of the problems associated with people meeting at different stages and be willing to do the work necessary to propel yourself from one stage to the next.

Identifying what stage you are in is a necessary first step. Are you *single* and deep down desiring a *committed* relationship? There's nothing wrong with that, as many people feel that way. But, in order to reach that final stage you first have to be willing to go out there and swim around a while in the *just dating* stage. Many people don't really like the *just dating* stage and all of the sorting, sifting and screening skills that are required to connect with someone with whom you are compatible. On the other hand, are you really in the *just dating* stage and having difficulty because you keep meeting people ready for a serious *commitment*? There is nothing wrong with being in any stage at any particular time and it is primarily dictated by the events of your life.

Life happens to all and affects each of us differently. For instance, someone who just went through a painful divorce may be an avowed *single*, while others are eager to jump right back into the *just dating* stage. Likewise, some people join Internet dating services for the sole purpose of *just dating*, yet others are in a serious search for a *committed* relationship. Some of the well-known dating services query for this very thing, so you in theory will know what stage a person is in and can make an appropriate choice. However, what one says and where they really are can be two very different things. If however, you have decided to get serious about your search for love you need to put some energy into it and get back out there.

Being willing to put yourself out in the world is the first step. There are many ways that people meet for relationships. Internet services are good, as they give you the opportunity to brush up on your sorting, sifting and screening skills. If you view it for just that, then you can avoid disappointment if you don't instantly make a love connection. Joining clubs, groups, volunteering and just participating in life will afford the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals for potential dating partners as well. You almost automatically ensure that you will at least have one thing in common from the start. If you are single and wishing for a committed relationship you need to be sure you are out in the world and participating. You never know whom you will meet and what you will find. Get yourself ready to take the intermediate stage of *just dating* and enjoy the process.

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