



You Are Never Too Old: Later Life Dating

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Dating as an older person can present some unique challenges. Being single (perhaps for the first time in many years), you may feel nervous about the prospect of connecting with another person for companionship and possibly even romance. This can result in insecurity and anxiety for even the most outgoing person. What will the children think? What will my married friends, neighbours and acquaintances think? Admitting to others that you are truly missing connecting with potential companions let alone a new love interest can pose a real barrier to later life dating.

Once you get over the discomfort and actually decide to proceed with dating how do you go about it? For many of us our first relationships were easy. We met partners through school, work, participation in church groups or youth groups. Later in life, meeting new companions may become more challenging. Many of us are no longer regular church goers and unless we are still working, our social interactions have changed with the elimination of a whole group of co-workers who might have served as connections either directly or through colleagues' "matchmaking".

Here are some suggestions on what to do. Join groups that share your interests. This could be anything from hiking, dinner, theatre or music appreciation groups, activities at seniors' centres or sports groups that meet regularly to socialize. Educational institutions can provide another great meeting opportunity. Take an inventory of your interests, then investigate courses that are offered at the colleges and universities nearby. Here in Hamilton, we are fortunate to have both a university and a community college as well as the Dundas Valley School of Art, all of which offer reduced rates for seniors and, in the case of McMaster University, free auditing of classes. Bus tours and even cruises that are exclusively for older adults are becoming even more

popular. Volunteering is another excellent activity that benefits the recipients of the service as well as the individual volunteer. Faith based groups offer social events, day trips and other outings that facilitate older adults meeting. Meetup.com is an online social group that connects people who have shared interests like dancing, photography, fine dining or cooking. There are also many on-line dating sites.

Some dating sites are designated specifically for the 55+ group but all of the sites invite people of any age to post a profile. Ask a friend to help you develop a dating profile that tells a little bit about yourself - interests, age, educational background etc. On-line dating involves taking a risk especially for the older adult. It is important to be wary of the possibility of fraud, scams and financial abuse. Meeting a potential companion in a public place and letting others know about the meeting is always recommended. Having taken the plunge, the dating activities are endless.

An issue that is both intimidating and worrisome is the fear of engaging in sexual behaviour after being celibate for a long time. For many this topic is not a comfortable one and there may be a reluctance to talking about this openly. It is important to think about this carefully and proceed in the way you are comfortable. For sure, being an older person does not mean immunity from sexually transmitted infections. One is never “too old” for safe sex.

You’re never too old to find companionship and maybe romance as well. If you decide to take the plunge, know that you are in good company. Good luck!

Cheryl Fenn is on the board of the Hamilton Council on Aging. For more information or to make a donation please see coahamilton.ca