

Dating 101: Tips from the Pound

In our efforts to understand our own phases of “bad dating luck,” some friends and I developed a tongue and cheek “Dog Pound Dating” assessment*. We were trying to find a way to explore why, at some points in our dating careers, it seemed that either only the “wrong” people seemed to gravitate towards us or that no one seemed to be interested at all. We quickly got bored with our own dating lives and expanded the assessment to cover a wide variety of dating barriers. And, given the fact that we’re all therapists, we came up with possible ways to use the information gleaned from the assessment. If you’ve had your own dating dry spells, take the assessment and see how it fits for you!

Step One: If you were a dog at the pound, which of the following would best describe you? Think about the way you present yourself to strangers and new acquaintances and be as honest as you can. If there is a missing dog type that might better describe you, feel free to add it in. You might also think about how a new acquaintance might describe you.

Brutus – a chow that bares his teeth and growls at the possible owners who come looking for a dog to take home but wags his tail, licks the staff, and cuddles with them when they come to feed him.

Goldie – a depressed pit bull that lies in the corner and doesn’t even bother to get up to greet folks.

Geezer – a cocker spaniel that is so excited when someone pays attention to him, that he pees on himself.

Buddy – a cuddly border collie that, if given the chance, will hump the leg of any one who stands still for too long.

Dharma – a friendly black lab that tries to get everyone who looks her way to play ball with her.

Jasper – a “Heinz 57 mix” that is totally involved with the other dogs and has no interest in visitors.

Spot – a small rat terrier that charms the socks off of everyone but never quite connects to anyone in particular.

Fritz – a nervous whippet that tucks his tail between his legs and trembles when people come to meet him.

Sasha – a regal great dane that that is interested in people but waits for people to come to her before making an effort to engage with them.

Olga – a domineering rottweiler that tries to control all the other dogs.

Sam – a self-sufficient german shepherd that accepts the attention that he’s given but for the most part tends to ignore visitors.

Sadie – a lonely golden retriever that mopes when she’s alone. When people come to visit, she nuzzles their hands, asks to be petted and whines when they leave.

Rex – a jack russell terrier that is so focused on escaping from the pound that he has no time to pay attention to visitors.

Step Two: Now that you’ve identified your “inner dog,” what sort of impact do you think you have on other people? Put differently: What kind of people are you likely to attract? What kind of people are you likely to push away? Are you even available for meeting and connecting with new people?

Step Three: Honor your strategies. If you have been pushing others away, honor that and find a gentle way to show appreciation for yourself for taking care of yourself. If, for example, you’ve created a life for yourself that is too busy for love, there is probably something going on for you. Perhaps you’ve been burned before and don’t want to be burned again. Perhaps you just got out of an intense relationship and have no real interest in putting out that kind of emotional energy at this time. The key here is to show compassion for yourself. No matter how successful or unsuccessful your strategy has been, ultimately, you adopted it as a way to take care of yourself and that self-care strategy needs to be acknowledged.

Step Four: Ask yourself, “What sort of dog at the pound would I like to be?” Would you like to be the kind of dog that a lot of people like and get to spread yourself around? Are you looking for that one special person to devote your affection to? Would you rather spend your time with books and cats and avoid people all together? Once you’ve got an idea of what that dog would look like and how it would behave, imagine what it would be like to be that dog. How does it “sit” with you to imagine new ways of approaching the world? Are you interested in changing your approach to the world in order to get what you want? If you are willing to change, think of one small thing you can do to start changing your life.

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