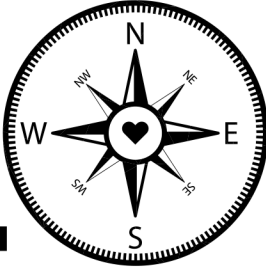


*the*

**LOVE**  
**COMPASS**

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the  
LOVE  
COMPASS

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A Girl's Guide to Finding  
*Authentic Love*



STEFANI SEEK

  
gatekeeper press  
Columbus, Ohio

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*A Girl's Guide to Finding Authentic Love*

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*Live your life by a compass, not a clock.*

—STEPHEN R. COVEY



*Out of my challenging love stories came  
my three precious gifts: Sophia, Lyla & Camilla.  
May you always trust your intuition, speak your truth,  
and love yourself the most.*





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# FORWARD



Candidly, my dear reader, I have been through some real relationship shit. I get a few raised eyebrows when I tell people I've been married and divorced twice. Some lean in with curiosity and congratulate me for living my truth and embracing my journey; others judge vocally or covertly through mutual acquaintances and wonder why I've been unable to stay committed to one man for more than ten years at a time. Through this messy, fun, happy, unhappy, heart-filled, gut-wrenching and epic relationship voyage, I have met myself. Through forty-five years of constant evolution, mistakes, lessons, falling in love, and loves lost, I learned that loving *myself* is all it took to find the authentic me. Once I started to figure out how to find and give that love to myself and nourish my own soul, everything began to fall into place. In retrospect, it would have been nice to have more directional guidance to help me understand and navigate the variable directions of my love life. That is why I've chosen a compass as an analogy for this journey. However, I have

no regrets about my love stories, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to share them with you.

In these pages, I will not share my complete story, as that is for another time and another book. Rather, I am taking the key learnings from my evolution and sharing them with you as anecdotes because I'm passionate about opening your eyes and heart to things I wish I knew when I was a little younger. After many years, I am with a man who is everything I have ever deserved and I am loved in the way that is reflective of the way I love myself now—beautifully, truthfully, and wholly. It took me longer to get here than I thought it would, so while there are no shortcuts through our life's most important lessons, it is my intention that the chapters in this book will bring you more quickly and happily into loving yourself and finding a special person to share that love with you in the most complete way.

Thank you for picking up this book; getting to spend time with you through these pages means the world to me. If the content resonates, please share it with another young woman you care about.

Let's begin our journey together!

With love,

**Stefani Seek**

# FROM MY HEARTBREAK TO HELPING YOU



## Navigating this book

*M*y Dad must have heard me through my bedroom door as I cried my eyes out, my throat hurting as each sob escaped, because there was a soft knock at the door.

“Stefani, are you okay?”

I have an awesome Dad, so I heaved out a strained, “Come in, Dad.”

I was sitting on my brand-new floral bedspread in my remodeled bedroom, but all of it was a blur as my tears flowed uncontrollably. My Dad asked what had happened. I explained that while at my high school homecoming dance (in the 90’s we went mainly in groups and nobody ever “proposed” homecoming to us with cute homemade signs—you lucky ladies!) my heart had been shattered into a thousand pieces. The boy I had a major

crush on, who had just taken me to his cousin's wedding as his date the month prior where we shared an amazing slow dance and kissed to "Lady in Red," totally ignored me and kissed another girl on the dance floor that night...and I had witnessed it all. The entire painful scene.

I was devastated. And while some of the details of that 1996 fall evening are still a blur to me, I remember one moment like it was yesterday: I looked at my Dad and cried dramatically, "No man is ever going to love me the way I want to be loved!!!"

Then I collapsed onto the bed while my Dad patted my back, somewhat uncertain of the entire scene as his oldest daughter clearly was going through her first major heartbreak. But he kindly and lovingly told me that my statement was completely untrue and *of course* a man was going to love me, and I would break many, many hearts in the process of finding him.

I can laugh about this scene now, but in similar ways, it was one that repeated over and over into my late 30s.

When I was seventeen, I did not consciously understand the power of manifestation, although decades later I would come to realize I had figured out manifestation principles by age ten and usually could put things into motion that I had only dreamed up weeks or months earlier. But when it came to teenage boys...and later, men...I had a knack for attracting those to whom I gave just about everything, and from whom I received very little.

I could will myself to get a 4.0 every year, nail band and choir auditions, get a 30 on my ACTs, win a speech competition, get elected to student council, earn a scholarship into the college I wanted, and receive a bid letter from the sorority I had eyed during orientation. As my life advanced, I willed my (first) future husband into existence during college so I could “pass the candle” and be able to announce the engagement to my sweet sorority sisters before graduation. I then brought into existence a wedding by the age of twenty-three, a six-figure career by the age of twenty-five, and a beautiful baby girl by the age of twenty-six.

And this is where a huge fault line opens up in my story. Everything I put my energy into regarding my student and career life had taken off like a rocket with no end in sight. But soon I watched my first marriage—almost like an observer outside of my body—fall apart. Many things happened over those five years that rapidly crumbled the foundation I thought I had built.

Two years after *that*, a second marriage. And unbelievably—to my utter shock and devastating disappointment—that marriage slowly eroded and fell apart throughout the twelve years we were together.

This is not a marriage book, my dear young women. However, it is important that you know some of my story, because it is from the fleeting love, pain, and now absolute contentment with which I bring you this book and the ideas and advice within its pages.

That happy baby girl I gave birth to during my first marriage has now become an incredible young woman who has started her own college adventure in 2021. And because of her, and because of her friends, I give you all my authentic voice, the wisdom I've gained, and the heart I've mended within these pages. I do this to help you understand the beautiful truths that already exist within yourselves when it comes to love and attracting the relationships you want.

If this book only serves my daughter and her friends with one or two ideas that empower their choices and their lives for the better, then I have accomplished a great deal. I also have unbridled hope this book reaches young women far and wide, so that you have the advice and experience of a woman still young at heart. Despite two marriages and divorces, I have never lost my faith in love. And you know what? Those marriages weren't failures. They started with a lot of love, fun, and excitement, and had some very happy times. The biggest blessings from those relationships are that I learned a lot, grew in ways I could have never anticipated, and have my three precious daughters. There are no relationship failures, lovely readers; simply lessons learned and opportunities to grow.

Knowing what to say in relationships, how to be authentic, how to express your voice and how to set your boundaries can be tough. After all, you are also learning who YOU truly are! You are out on your own, mentally starting to separate from the things



that made you a child. Growing up and trying to decide what you want to major in at age nineteen and crossing your fingers that you pick the right thing so that you have a great career you still love in your 40s is scary as hell. And while you are supposed to be doing that, you have freedom, lots of options and young men...who are mostly still just boys in grown men's bodies, God love 'em! They are trying to figure it out too, and because boys mature more slowly than girls, their "figuring out things" can sometimes come at the expense of your precious heart.

A compelling event happened to me that brought this book into being. It was September 15, 2020...the dreaded year of Covid-19 and social distancing, violence and racial tension, and a controversial Presidential election season. My oldest daughter had just gone on a date with a guy who...it's so painful to write this...apparently forgot to put on deodorant. He had been nice to her in their Snapchat so she was optimistic. She tried to overlook the body odor issue at dinner, as they attempted to make conversation, but she just wasn't feeling it on her end. He texted her after the dinner, telling her he had a great time and wanted to take her out again. She was faced with the dilemma of hurting his feelings versus expressing what she already knew she wanted to do: that there could not be another date. But inside her head—in a thought process that a lot of incredibly great young women who are kind and smart might do—she asked me, "Mom, do you think I should give him another chance?" She was willing to take on a second date, with someone she knew was not a fit for her standards or expectations, just to avoid hurting his feelings.

And while I love that she didn't want to hurt his feelings and cared about being kind, everything in her gut told her this wasn't going to work. Besides the lack of deodorant...did I mention he asked her to split the check and Venmo him for her chicken fingers?! Yet, why do women feel obligated to avoid hurting a man's feelings? Or, what compels one woman to tell that guy, "No way I'll go on another date with you!" explicitly, but another woman finds herself holding back and wanting to avoid the conflict of saying no?

Psychologists have written thousands of books and articles on what makes us run towards or avoid conflict, and a psychologist I am not. Therefore, I am not here to diagnose you, but to coach you through relationship challenges and how you talk to yourself within the context of either seeking a relationship or being in one.

So, we are going to cover quite a bit of groundwork in this book from a non-clinical point of view, using my own life experiences with relationships and men to guide you!

### HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT:

- **Candor, straight-shooting, and real-world situations from me, your relationship coach:**

---

I may be in my 40s and a Mom, but ladies...I love romance and sex as much as you do. Probably even more so, because

I've had more years of it, more experiences with it, and I am finally so happy with this body that has produced three children. I've learned to be fully present and enjoy all the variety, lessons and experiences that relationships have to offer. I have no shame anymore, literally, and that's an amazing feeling. Thank you, Brené Brown! (see my book recommendations at this end of this book—Brené is at the top, and if you haven't "met" her yet, get to know her, because her insights on shame are a game-changer.)

- **Dating situations and “scripts”:**

---

When my daughter became a teen, her friends started asking me often for advice, coming to me with questions like “What do I say when he acts like *this*?” And then that very September night during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, as my daughter had her friends on speakerphone recounting the body odor story, they were like—“We want to know what your Mom has to say!” So, we all got on the phone and chatted and my daughter's friend asked me to “please write a book.” She wanted a book with scripts and thinking exercises to know how to ground herself and what to say during difficult situations. So here I am, scripts in hand for you to use as templates. But I encourage you to make those scripts your own, find your own authentic voice, and use your intuition.

- **Prompts to help you think through what you *really* want in life and in love:**
- 

Ladies, in this digital age where everything is texted, Snapchatted, or TikTok'ed, know that there is a supernatural power in taking your pen and putting it to paper. Remember how I told you about my manifestation gifts? Most of it came to be because I literally wrote down what I wanted and FELT as if it had already happened. Writing down what you want and feeling "as if" these intentions are already in your life works magic. It is a far more powerful practice than just thinking about these ideas and wishes in your head.

Human consciousness is evolving rapidly, and most of you understand that there is a supernatural world and powers at work we can feel but cannot see. When you use your brain to power your hand to write down the words of your heart, miracles happen. Get your pen ready to use with this book. And yep...you guessed it...I never wrote down what I wanted in a romantic relationship. Big mistake. HUGE mistake. I'm going to try to help you avoid those same mistakes by using this book as a tool for thought and action.

While my stories come solely from my heterosexual experiences, if you are LGBTQ+, many of these scripts and ideas can absolutely be applied in all kinds of relationships. For the sake of consistency in this book, I will address female-male romantic

partnerships and dialogues, but I hope that everyone reading this book—regardless of religion, creed, sexual orientation—finds wisdom in these pages that help you continue to find and speak your authentic voice in your relationships. Thank goodness we are evolving as a collective consciousness and we all have more and more access to resources and help. Love is love. If we are fortunate enough to find someone who sees and loves us wholly and completely in this lifetime, then...celebrate! The world needs more love and understanding. If everyone can be fully themselves and love and be loved, then truly, we can move mountains and elevate the vibrations on this planet.



# NAVIGATING WITH YOUR COMPASS



Read the instruction manual!

I knew I was terribly lost as my first marriage was rapidly dissolving. In trying to find a way to escape the pain, I and my already-stretched bank account dove headfirst into bidding in an online charity auction to win a trip to see my favorite country music artist at the time, Keith Urban, play in Portland, Oregon. I live in St. Louis. I didn't know anyone who lived in Portland then, and I still don't know anyone who lives in Portland twenty years later! But I heard it was a beautiful city (it is!) and I wanted to get on a plane, fly far away from my relationship, and have time to myself to think about what I was going to do about my troubled marriage.

There was a part of me that hoped I'd uncover within myself a way to save my marriage during that trip...some deep, undiscovered longing or convincing reason to return home and tell my

then-husband that I was willing to keep trying. That moment never came. While I enjoyed the concert and was thrilled to meet Keith in person and get to shake his hand, I experienced an overwhelming sense of aloneness on that trip. I realized that it didn't matter the city I flew off to or what adventure I chose. The pain of feeling alone in a relationship was far worse than feeling alone while I was *actually* alone! And so, that trip gave me the courage to make the break. Miranda Lambert's music was also a big part of my life at the time, and some of her earliest songs like "Kerosene", "Bring Me Down" and "Love Your Memory" were the soundtrack of my return flight home. It was time to extract myself from a toxic relationship that wasn't good for me, and I broke the news to my husband about a week after my return and asked for the divorce. But wow...how I wish that in the year that followed my divorce, I had had a guide. That I had understood how to find my "North." Instead, as I relished my fresh start and newfound "freedom," I threw myself head-first into dating again.

I wanted SO badly to find another husband. To have more children. To find someone to love and to love me back. I didn't stop to create and read my own instruction manual. I didn't know how to read my heart...or how to navigate my love compass. I met my next husband within a year of my first divorce and moved so fast into an all-in relationship that my compass needle must have been spinning around and around!

I do not want this spinning to happen to you, but it could. If it does, that is okay because life goes off course sometimes, and that serves our highest good...so that we can learn and find our



way back to our true path. My intent is that the guidance and exercises in the pages ahead minimize the spinning and get you on your path more easily.

So, how should you use this book?

Within your late teens and even through your mid 20's (the age range for which this book is intended), you have very diverse relationship experiences. You may have had a string of romances and relationships by now and multiple sexual partners. You may have had your heart broken by the one guy you finally decided to sleep with and now feel shame and a reluctance to try dating again because his Snapchats completely stopped after you were with him. You may frequently seek out hook-ups, or you may be a virgin entering college with barely a high school boyfriend to speak of. You may even be committed to abstinence until marriage.

Guess what? None of you are wrong, and every single one of you is living out an experience that is teaching you lessons to advance you on your life's journey. Every experience lived by every reader of this book is valid, and so as a result, each person's thought process in working through this book will be different. And that's a beautiful thing, because you will take from this book the messages you are meant to hear and use.

I want to lay out a few **Navigation Fundamentals** for this book, especially since you might be reading this with your circle of friends, with sorority sisters, or an impromptu book club in your dorm room or apartment.

## Navigation Fundamental #1

---

Feel the love for your fellow women going through this college or young adulthood experience no matter how sophisticated or awkward, wealthy or poor, commercially gorgeous or beautifully unique, extroverted or introverted, experienced in romantic relationships or inexperienced you each are.

Take a minute and realize this: YOU ARE ALL CONNECTED. One day, I promise you, you are going to be work colleagues with these women, stay-at-home moms with these women, having neighborhood driveway cocktail hours with these women, cheering during your kid's soccer games with these women, crying about your husband's job loss with these women, or serving on the dreaded/beloved PTO with these women. It might be hard to imagine now, but your life will take unexpected twists and turns. The sooner you all realize that you are sisters who each—at the core of herself—just wants to love and be loved—you raise your vibe and those energies of the women around you. Be kind. These women from all walks of life may one day be your bridesmaid, the doctor saving your life, the firefighter saving your home, the woman fixing your hair who is SO much more than your stylist but like a therapist, or the neighbor who offers to be an emergency back-up for childcare while you rush off to an unexpected meeting. You will need these women. Stand in solidarity and vow to support one another as you explore the concepts in this book together. I've met women who are too judgmental of

one another and I'm guessing you have too; so, let's instead seek to understand and help each other.

## **Navigation Fundamental #2**

---

Even if you never discuss this book or share your feelings and notes as you read through it with others, promise that with *yourself* you'll be completely and totally honest.

Be open and willing to peel back the layers of what makes you, you! Consider where your truth rests in all of this. You can only manifest what you desire if you are candid and honest with yourself. Believe me—the parts you hide will come out at some point in your life in the most unexpected of ways. Might as well expose as many of them as you can right now, while you are young with so many opportunities to create the life and relationship experiences that your soul craves. Honesty with yourself will help you find your power.

## **Navigation Fundamental #3**

---

Be kind to yourself. *Always* be kind to yourself.

We as women are too hard on ourselves. We criticize our noses, our hair, our weight, our intelligence, and our social interactions. I have learned through my own wonderful female friendships over three adult decades that even the most gorgeous woman in the room is going through something that might surprise you. So, stop comparing yourself to whatever the hell you

think “normal” is because there is no such thing as normal. I’ve known couples in the business world who appear to be living by the book who are actually swingers or who have lovers on the side...in the middle of suburbia with two kids and a golden retriever. You have no idea what normal is for someone. You may read the coaching tips in this book and think “Ugh, why didn’t I think of *that* when I was trying to break up with Mason back in June of 2020?” or “I can’t believe I let myself do *that* in my last relationship with Jack—what was I thinking?” Please know there is not a single woman on planet earth who hasn’t had a relationship regret, mishap, or something occur that was less than the total truth of what she desired. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Above all, have compassion for yourself. You are on a journey that won’t be completed until you draw your last breath—approach your relationship journey with curiosity and an open mind.

#### **Navigation Fundamental #4**

---

Remember that you are *loved*. You really, really are.

Here’s the thing...the love I’m speaking about isn’t what comes externally from someone to you. This is the love *within* you. The very miracle of you being born and coming into life on this planet Earth is the universe’s expression of love for you. You have always had all the love you need and desire inside of you. When you meet someone you fall in love with, whether romantically or as friendship, it is simply because they are reflecting back to

you the love you already have within. You don't need someone to water you—you *are* the water. So please do not despair no matter where you are in your dating relationships. How I wish I knew when I was a lovesick teenager that no boy, no girl, no man, or no woman had the power to give or take love from me; I already am Love. And so are you, you lovely woman. We are going to talk a lot more about this concept in the chapters ahead.

If you are willing to accept these ground rules, I'm proud of you, because we are in for an exciting, insightful journey! This is a truly transformational time in your life. How you begin to think about your relationships now will begin to form the foundation of your future.

Remember, all you have is the now, so focus on what is right here and right now, and the rest will begin to unfold as it should.

One of the great spiritual thought leaders of our time, and the inspiration for my post-divorce journey, Eckhart Tolle, says this in response to stress: "Ask yourself, do I really have a problem at this *exact* moment?"

Ladies, through some pretty bad relationship crap and emotional turmoil, on my darkest days of my second marriage dissolving, I took Mr. Tolle's advice and began practicing it. I looked at my distressed face in the mirror, and asked myself, "Stefani, at this exact moment, this exact second, do you really have a problem?" And guess what? At that exact moment, even though

technically you could say my life was unfolding in a temporarily awful way, I was really okay **at that exact moment**. I realized I was breathing, that I had life inside of me, that my heart and its buried passion was still in there. And then I chose to live onto the next moment, and the next moment, and the next moment... until eventually, those moments became thousands of moments and I am still living, breathing, thriving and happy today, in this very moment as I write this very sentence.

We're going to talk about this "being present in the moment" too, because it will save your tail nearly every time you find yourself in a questionable situation with your romantic interest. Once you grasp it, it is extremely exciting and empowering; it is a total game-changer.

I am sending you a huge hug because you picked up this book to change your dating and relationship game and to improve your life experience. This is big. In case nobody has told you this recently, I am proud of you. I may not know you by name, but I feel you and I get you. Remember, we are all connected, and this is how I have come to know at least a small piece of your heart, no matter how different and diverse our life experiences may be.

# LOVING YOURSELF FIRST



## Why it's not selfish

The phrase “love yourself” is thrown around so loosely that it starts to lose its meaning. Really—what does this even mean? My girlfriend, Jeanine, a Zumba and cycling instructor with enough energy to single-handedly light up a New York city street, met me for lunch a few summers ago. She was glowing with happiness in a way I hadn't seen since the fresh exuberance of our mid-20's when we worked together in the tech industry. Over lunchtime tacos and margaritas, I asked her what was giving her such joy? And her response surprised me. Jeanine said with conviction, “I finally decided to put myself first in my life.”

Initially, I had a somewhat visceral reaction to Jeanine's statement. I experienced a light speed combination of surprise, admiration, recognition of truth, and maybe a little envy and judgment mixed in there too. I wondered if her statement sounded selfish. I asked her for more information. (Quick tip: *always* lean in and

ask for more information when you experience a strong reaction within yourself—it’s your body’s way of telling you that it might be time to grow your awareness). Jeanine went on to explain that she had spent years putting everyone’s needs and feelings ahead of her own: her bosses and co-workers, her husband, her children, her friends and extended family. For too long, life was pulling her in different directions and she was saying yes to things and people that did not align with her purpose.

Jeanine said once she made the decision to put *her* purpose and heart first, everything started falling into place. In fact, this practice actually *strengthened* her relationship with her husband! She grew in her confidence, zest for life, and nurtured her heart’s desires, and her husband found it extremely attractive, which reignited their relationship.

Jeanine had learned to love herself; and in doing so, found her true north. The question for you, reader, is this: Do you love yourself? How do you know if you really love yourself or not? And how do you practice loving yourself?

In *Psychology Today*, Dr. John Amodeo writes that self-love is not about doing things *for* yourself—although that can certainly be an output of self-love. Rather, “Self-love means finding peace within ourselves—resting comfortably within the depths of our being.”<sup>1</sup> Truly, self-love is accepting what makes you...you!

So, if you connect this concept of true self-love to the popular sentiment of “once you love yourself, you’ll find love,” it means



that if you can learn to be comfortable being you and knowing who YOU are...with all of your amazing qualities and imperfections...you will then be able to receive a partner who also sees you for you. A person loves you for you, and that, my dear woman, is the Holy Grail of Love...and everything we long for in love.

Everyone is on a different self-love journey. Some people are innately born with the ability to accept and love themselves. Some find it in their 30s, 40s, or 50s. Some leave this earth without ever really having learned to love themselves.

I was a confident kid growing up, with supportive and loving parents, inspiring adult role models in school and community organizations, and surrounded by a safe and secure environment. If you would have asked me at age twenty-two if I loved myself, I wouldn't have hesitated to say, "Well, *of course* I love myself!"

Writing and reading that now makes me cringe a little. Uh, nope, I didn't love myself then. I knew I had a loving heart. I knew I was kind to people and animals. I knew I had a lot to offer the world. But I had not yet learned to "be with myself" and love her.

Instead, I was always shape-shifting—trying to please my parents, my authority figures, my teachers, my friends, my employers, my boyfriends. I would pick apart my handling of a situation in my mind or ruminate over and over the words I had spoken, wondering if I'd said the right thing.

Do you find yourself doing any of this as well?

Remember: self-love is learning to *be with yourself* and loving your spirit, body, and mind for everything that she is right now. It is getting comfortable deep into your bones...like an old friend you just want to cuddle up to and love, when you don't care how she looks to the world. You just know you love her for her. Do you love yourself as much as you do your best girlfriend? Or your mom? Or your sister?

While the basis of this book is about your romantic relationships, the first and most important, loving relationship you need to have is with yourself! North on your love compass is truly self-love. When you love yourself, you will naturally gravitate towards those potential partners who also know their true north, and that will lay the foundation for an incredible relationship.

How do you cultivate self-love? It begins with what you tell yourself. What words are you using that nobody else can hear except for you?

To help you think through this, what you would tell your best friend if he/she/they experienced a major disappointment in life? You would tell her that she is beautiful inside and out and that you believe she can get through this difficult time, and that you are there to support her. You likely would give her a big hug and ask how you could help. You might bring her some flowers or a gift to cheer her up. You might just sit with her in silence, letting her cry on your shoulder, providing her a sense of safety and warmth as she processes her disappointment or grief.

Now, let's turn the tables. What happens when *you* are the one who is experiencing a disappointment, a moment of social awkwardness, a trauma or a loss? Can you take those same loving practices you just gave your best friend and become your *own* best friend?

Do you mentally beat yourself up over a disappointment? Do you tell yourself you are dumb, not worthy of what you wanted anyway, obsessing over your flaws and allowing negative self-talk to run through your mind?

Or can you just BE with yourself and give yourself a hug and tell yourself that you are beautiful and still worthy of love despite this setback?

We often treat everyone else better than we treat ourselves. We will jump to ask a friend or loved one or a boyfriend what they need, and then suppress what we need or not even take the time to be our own best friend because we are running around taking care of everyone else and putting their needs first.

*How can you expect someone to fall in love with you when you have not yet fallen in love with yourself?*

For those of you who are Christian, you will recall learning that Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>2</sup> He never said, "Love your neighbor (friend, partner, parent) MORE than yourself!" The word "as" has power here. Are you loving yourself as much as you pour your heart into others?

And that was my friend Jeanine's point. For several years, she temporarily forgot to love herself as much as everyone else. She was pouring her time, energy, and heart into what everyone else around her wanted and not into her wants and needs. One of her desires was to open a fitness studio, and what that required was that she and her husband needed to free up cash for that investment. She and her husband agreed to sell their 6,000 square foot dream home with a private pool and move into a cute but much smaller apartment so that she could fund her dream. When she went to her husband, eyes shining, sharing this authentic dream, he said YES. They sold their home, moved into the coolest apartment complex, and restarted Life 2.0 in their 40's...all because Jeanine decided to love herself. Jeanine said her family is even closer than ever now as a result. In putting her needs first, she actually cultivated more love for her family too.

Leaning into Jeanine's story helped me realize that putting oneself first is *not* selfish. In fact, the most practical example of this is when the airline flight attendant instructs us to put on our own oxygen mask first before assisting others. *You* have to be alive, breathing and thriving first to be a help and a friend to others!

You will find love when you glow with love for yourself! This might require you to step out of the dating scene for just a little while to do some work on yourself. Maybe it's just a week of a daily meditation, a month of going to the gym to gain energy and put your health first, or signing up for the photography class you've been dreaming about since age eight. Yes, those are "doing"

actions, but before you “do” you are making the decision to BE you! Ask yourself, what makes your soul sing? Follow those desires of your heart, and eventually, that practice of self-love will lead you to the romantic love you seek.

Let’s put this into practice and get your heart moving in the direction of authentic and joyful self-love!

### EXERCISE:

Recall a difficult past or current situation that one of your very best friends or closest family members has faced. In the space below, write down the loving phrases you’ve said to them in support of their situation. Here is an example:

*Julie, I’m so sorry to hear you lost your job. It doesn’t sound like it was a fair situation. You are so smart and hard-working. I know another door is going to open for you! I want you to know that I’m here for you to cheer you on and be a shoulder to lean on. I believe in you! Is there anything specifically I can do to help? Why don’t I bring over your favorite meal, and we can watch a movie together to relax and unwind?*

Now, recall one of your own past difficult situations or something you are currently facing. Act AS IF you are comforting a friend or family member. See the example I provide below, and use that as a guide to write down loving and affirming phrases below:

*Hey me, I am so sorry that Sarah said those hurtful things about you to all of our mutual friends. That was awful and it hurts so badly. She's not a bad person, but she was out of line. Please remember that you have a good heart and that I love you. You are a great friend to many women. Don't forget how much Claire and Amy love you— Amy just sent you that sweet text yesterday! Hang in there, because it is all going to be okay. You'll get through this tough time.*

**Get out that pen and insert your own self-love statement below:**

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*How does that feel?* Do you think you can begin a practice of self-love when you face adversity, and speak to your own self as if you were your best friend in the entire world? You might be naturally great at this, and if so...kudos to you! You are already well on your life's journey of self-love. If this self-love talk still feels a little unnatural, keep doing the exercise above every time you face a challenging situation, and talk to yourself AS IF you are

supporting your best friend. After several deliberate practices, it will start to become more of a habit and you will learn to *be* with yourself—disappointments, flaws and all.

And by the way, you can practice self-love when things are going right too! That is when this exercise really gets fun. A great opportunity to practice self-love is by talking a solo walk on a beautiful day. Look around, take in the beauty of nature, breathe deep, and tell yourself, “Wow, I’m creating a great life for myself. I get to be in all of this beauty, in the sunshine, and I LOVE ME!”

In my own self-love journey, I have taken many walks outside. Sometimes when nobody was looking, and now when people are totally looking because I have no shame (thanks again, Brené!), I throw my arms up into the air in elation and declare that “I love me” and remind myself that I am special and blessed and loved. I can literally feel my vibe rise. It feels warm and tingly all over and my heart gets warm and radiant. My neighbors may think I’m little crazy in witnessing this self-love scene, but my sweet rescue dog, Annie the Chiweenie, looks up at me with loving eyes and I know that all is right in my world!

As you grew up from childhood to young adulthood, you may not have been loved in the ways you craved and needed. As your newest author-friend, I want to say that I am so sorry if this happened to you. If you felt unloved by people who played a major role in your upbringing—such as a parent, sibling, or important adult figure—you may have some deep scars to heal. For this,

I recommend inner-child work. It's a process that involves speaking to your child-self, as if she is at the age of five, seven, or ten, and using loving questions and words with that child to find out what is hurting her—just as you would with your little sister, niece, or a child in your life you adore. It goes pretty deep and it is helpful to have a trained therapist's help, although admittedly I once did some inner child work alone in my bedroom at the age of forty-three and cried my eyes out for a good hour as I worked through a traumatic experience that happened to me around age five. I got through it successfully and experienced great healing from it, but I do urge you to have a friend or loved one to lean on in case you need it. Please look at the list of resources provided at the end of this book to help you with your inner child healing journey. It can truly heal past wounds so you can move along in your life's journey with grace, forgiveness, confidence, and with a healed heart.

“Love Yourself” is a phrase so easily tossed around it runs the risk of becoming cliché. So go deeper and discover what “loving yourself” means for *you*. It's different for everyone, yet the process is the key to unlocking your authentic power and true voice. You are a precious soul that has come to earth to learn from this school of life, and I can tell you—loving yourself is the biggest lesson your soul wants you to learn. In loving yourself, you can give love to others. That is what all of the great spiritual teachers have been trying to tell us for thousands of years.



Fill your tank first, my friend. Put on your oxygen mask first. Hug yourself. Treat yourself like your own best friend. It's not selfish. In loving yourself, you will always have the supply you need to love others with joy and fullness.



**Compass Point:** When you find your true north of self-love, you are listening to your own internal compass. Get good at self-love and actively practice it; you will then not only lift yourself up in that love, you will also become a magnet for a romantic partner who has learned to practice self-love too. And you will both be ready to receive love because you have been practicing loving yourself first. Two halves don't make a whole love. Two whole people who practice self-love create relationships that grow, teach and create incredible opportunities for soul-level connection.



# STOP PROJECTING INTO THE FUTURE



## Get present

*I*t pains me to write the title to this chapter. Why? I'm totally a dreamer (big hugs to my fellow Pisceans out there). I have always loved to fantasize and daydream about the possibilities with a romantic partner—known or imaginary. To envision what he will say to me when he picks me up for a date, to imagine what people will say about us as a couple when we walk into a party, to think about how great we'll look in an Instagram post together, to think about how hot he's going to look with his shirt off, to imagine his future career (and yes, his parents are wealthy so he probably will be too). Maybe I'm his "dream" woman and he'll buy me a HUGE diamond and I'll be on "Say Yes to the Dress" and we'll have babies and do the thing where they stuff either pink or blue helium balloons into a box at a gender-reveal party and live happily ever after, and ...OMG, JUST STOP. Seriously. Stop.

I'm a born romantic and many of you probably are too. It is so fun to think about the possibilities. To get excited when you see him walking into work. To have your heart leap out of your chest when you get his text or Snapchat. That is totally okay—that's the fun stuff of life and has kept poets and writers and movie producers and actors and actresses employed for hundreds of years. We love love.

Where things go off the rails is when you begin living for that future, and force-feeding those fake, romantic scenarios into existence with your real life partner. Creating future stories takes you out of the present and fogs up your windshield big time. Have you ever had the weather change on you while in a restaurant or at a party, and you come out to your car at midnight and everything is dewy and fogged up and you have to remind yourself how to work the defroster? You cannot see until the defroster clears up your view. It would be dangerous to get into the car and drive if you cannot clearly see through the windshield.

Romanticizing and fantasizing too far ahead into the future with this guy who just asked you on a first date can be dangerous. It's like fogging up your windshield. Instead of clear sight ahead on just that first date "drive," you start fogging up your windshield with thoughts of "what if?"

They can be negative what-ifs like, "What if it fails miserably, what if he's a terrible kisser, what if he's just expecting a hook-up" to seemingly positive thoughts like "What if he is so

great but doesn't like me as much as I like him" and "What if he's 'the one?'" All kinds of projected thoughts are fogging up your windshield.

So, how do you first work your relationship defroster?

I am going to use dating my first husband as an example, because we met perhaps where you are now, my dear reader: in college. I met him on a summer internship. Me—the ambitious blonde marketer at a large amusement park taking customer surveys throughout the park. Him—the handsome, tanned, charming-but-tough security guard doing his internship in his sharp uniform as a precursor to his career in law enforcement.

After a great first date, I went total future fast-forward, told a girlfriend I was absolutely going to marry him, and did one hell of a job fogging up my windshield. One year later, he subconsciously felt that pressure I had projected on him that he was "the one" and proposed, because he loved me, and I loved him, and he didn't want to lose me. Once you get engaged, then all you can think about is the fun job of wedding planning and suddenly, that important opportunity to get to know this person deeply and ensure you are compatible with another human being FOR LIFE gets put on pause, because you are asking your girlfriends to be your bridesmaids, picking out your dream dress(es), planning for steak or salmon for your guests, and fantasizing about the romantic honeymoon in Maui.

In the process, even though I really loved him, I fogged up my windshield. I missed red flags that began the demise of our marriage just a few months in. Red flags we should have talked about, had I only “been present,” and in the moment, digesting the things he was saying to me and the things I wasn’t saying, because momentum kept propelling us forward.

One example of a red flag I allowed to fly right past my windshield was my ex-husband’s family culture. His family was very, very different from mine. His household was “fly by the seat of your pants” and mine was extremely structured and traditional. Neither one of these cultures were right or wrong...they were just different. There was unhealed trauma from his relationship with his Dad who had since passed away, and he was raised by a strong and intelligent single Mom who was well-intentioned but serving the role of both the Mom and Dad. Therefore, she was at times an overwhelming personality for my sensitive self to experience. My ex-husband had a brother I couldn’t forge an emotional connection with no matter how hard I tried, and a sweet sister who had made some life choices that I struggled to understand. It was a haphazard family environment that didn’t align at all with my vision of family. I did not pause to consider how the months and years ahead full of family events, weddings, baptisms, birthday parties, and holidays might not feel “like home” to me.

I remember when I knew I was done with my marriage...his family was having a birthday party for a relative and I refused

to get out of bed and go. I was done with his family culture; I couldn't endure one more event. Had our marriage been healthy there is a chance we could have worked through these family culture differences. But the vast chasm between how our families operated in daily life did unfortunately impact how we communicated with each other.

My "gut" showed me a red flag during our time of dating and engagement, and instead of hitting the brakes to have a discussion about how we'd handle these family culture differences, I just smiled my way through the things that made me uncomfortable, people-pleasing my way through the discomfort, focusing on how much I loved my man. Sadly, that was my mistake, and I wish I would have had more courage to express my concerns. Maybe we would have slowed down marriage plans. Maybe we would have hired a therapist. Maybe we still would have gotten married and divorced. Unfortunately, I used the excitement of wedding plans and the scenarios I envisioned of us having fun as a newly married couple, which isn't inherently wrong at all, to focus on only the ideal future as I fogged up my windshield and lost my direction. And attempting to navigate through a windshield I couldn't see through led me to the day I crashed and couldn't even bear to get out of bed to go to a family event.

So, ladies, here is my coaching point for this chapter:

**Take each text, each Snap, each date one moment and one day at a time.** If you want to fantasize about your future with

this person, that's okay and it's fun, but be conscious that this is exactly what you are doing. And set a timer!!! I joke about the timer, but not entirely. Let yourself imagine what your relationship with this person could be as you listen to your favorite love song while driving to your job, but then...stop it. Enjoy the fantasy but realize that it is just a fantasy.

Because, if you do not take this new relationship moment by moment, your instincts—the amazing gift of your intuition—will not have the chance to guide you. You will stamp out these important gut feelings mercilessly with your future projections, and that window will fog up faster than you can blink.

Think about it...you can plan a road trip from Missouri to Florida, from Indiana to South Carolina, from Kansas to California, but you can only get there four tire rotations at a time. If you don't pay attention to the road signs in front of you, you might accidentally run a red light or miss a yield sign. And that can put your life—and your heart and well-being—at risk. I want you to become aware of your surroundings, and you can only do this when you are fully present.

On your first, second, eleventh date and in every text, call or chat, here are Two Important Questions to ask yourself to stay present:



- **QUESTION #1: Did I feel myself have a reaction to something he did/didn't do, and what was that reaction?**

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*Example:* He picked you up but didn't get out of the car to greet you or open your door. In your value system, you value chivalry. The observer inside of you noticed this, thinking *hmmmm, I kind of wish he had opened that door for me, or at least got out of the car to greet me.* Pay attention to that.

*Example:* He treated you like the absolute queen that you are, but during dinner, he was really rude to the waiter. In fact, he made fun of the waiter in a way that made you feel kind of bad for the waiter. Yet he was treating you like a queen and you loved every minute of it. But for a split second, somewhere in your consciousness, you felt bad for the waiter. Pay attention to that.

*Example:* Wow, this guy made me feel safe. I loved that. I felt like he was really looking at me and genuinely listening to what I had to say. GREAT! Pay attention to that.

- **QUESTION #2: Can I verbalize my feelings when I'm around him?**

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*Example:* He changes your plans last-minute, but you want to please him and so even though your first instinct is to say "But I really was excited about that Greek restaurant we were

going to try” you find yourself just smiling and saying “Sure, whatever you want sounds great to me!” Pay attention to that.

*Example:* He makes a seemingly harmless joke in front of a group of your or his friends like “Kaitlyn is so high maintenance—I swear, it takes her like two hours to get ready to go out. Sorry we’re late, guys”. Everyone laughs, and so do you—but inside you cringe. Later, when you are alone in the car with him, you want to speak up to tell him that the reason it takes you longer to get ready is that you are trying to find the perfect outfit because you want to impress him, or you were running late from class, or your mom had called and you were catching up with her and lost track of time, but you stay silent to keep the peace because you don’t want to start a fight or seem difficult. Pay attention to that.

*Example:* You have a disagreement, and you do verbalize your feelings. He respectfully listens to what you have to say, and even though he still might disagree, he holds space for you and acknowledges that he can see your side of the story. GREAT! Pay attention to that.

Be present in the moment and ask yourself if you felt safe enough to express your feelings or speak your voice in that moment with your dating partner. You are in an incredible time of your life, full of hope and possibilities—you can experiment with your

voice! For many of you, away from home for the first time, you are finding what your voice means and the impact it can have for yourself and on others. Being able to speak your voice in a romantic partnership is critical for your soundness of self and your peace of mind.

Use your voice with respect and kindness for the other person, but sing that voice out loud and true. Many of us learn to do this at a young age with those in authority, with those within our family, and with those in our group of girlfriends. Yet, it is amazing and frightening how sometimes this can all go out the window when we are with our prospective romantic choice. Some of you may find you stifle your voice; others may react with a voice that overpowers your partner. I could write another book on voice equality and toxicity in a relationship (and I might!) but for now, if you find yourself clamming up because your partner operates in a way that makes it difficult to voice how you feel, or if you are inflicting this upon yourself, think about the type of communication you need in a relationship that will grow and nurture you and not inhibit you.



**Compass Point:** Projecting the future and all of your fantasies onto your relationship will fog up your windshield, causing you to lose sight of where you actually are in your journey with that person. By staying in the moment, and checking in with your feelings while you are with them, your instincts and “gut” will tell you what you need to know about the relationship. You are learning to pay close attention to how this person makes you feel on a daily basis, so you notice either the red flags that can caution you to slow down and reassess, or the green lights that encourage you to keep going and build this relationship.

## BUT HE'S SO HOT...!



### Creating your dating boundaries

*W*e've covered paying attention and being present with your feelings as you begin to date. As a lot of you might know, this can all go out the window when you are intensely and physically attracted to someone. Maybe he is the hottest yet also the most loving and sensitive guy in the world and all of your present moments are telling you: *This is it! This is amazing!* If that is that case, that *is* awesome! Sounds like you have a keeper, at least for a while... and maybe forever (but don't start planning your wedding yet, please!)

It can happen, though, that the physical attraction overshadows the tiny voice you hear in your head. Those present moments that don't sit quite right with you. What should you do then?

This might be my favorite part of the book—because I think it is the most important part: **Knowing Your Boundaries**. Do you know your dating boundaries?

I didn't. Nobody ever talked to me about boundaries when I was growing up except for "stranger danger," being polite to my elders, not talking back disrespectfully, and looking both ways when I crossed the street. Really. And my parents were awesome. Which makes me wonder how many of you with awesome parents also weren't taught about boundaries? This is why I'm dedicating an entire chapter to boundary-setting. Doing this effectively and with intention can literally alter the course of your life.

*"You have to be able to set boundaries, otherwise the rest of the world is telling you who you are and what you should be doing. You can still be a nice person and set boundaries."*<sup>1</sup>

—OPRAH WINFREY

So, exactly what is a boundary? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a boundary as "something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent."<sup>2</sup> At [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org), an excellent resource for young women ages thirteen to twenty-six, relationship boundaries are explained:

*Boundaries in a relationship are kind of like this; they help each person figure out where one person ends and the other begins. In short, boundaries help you define what you are comfortable with and how you would like to be treated by others.*<sup>3</sup>

Some of you out there might be pros at boundary-setting. Unfortunately, abuse, mistreatment, or disrespect from an authority

figure or parent can accelerate a young person's need to identify their boundaries very early in life. Or perhaps you had a strong sense of self growing up, and continue to know exactly what you will and will not stand for from a parent, friend, or authority figure. And some of us (ahem, you are reading her words) are born people-pleasers.

We people-pleasers are often the absolute worst at setting boundaries. The positive feedback and affirmation we receive from others by putting their wants and desires ahead of our own fuels a terrible cycle of giving, getting affirmation, and then giving more. We often people-please to assuage the insecurities, jealousies, or emotional rollercoasters of those we love. We forget we deserve to receive. In this cycle, we lose all sense of self and forget where our own happiness, desires, and truth begin and end. Boundaries get blurred, are lost, or were never formed in the first place.

In the summer of 2020, as we were in the thick of Covid-induced social distancing, my middle daughter's social media and digital interactions picked up rapidly. One day, I found my typically stoic eleven-year-old in tears. One of her best friends had disparaged her in a group chat. When one girl in the group called my daughter "pretty" and "talented", her friend crossed out "pretty," changing it to "ugly;" "talented" was replaced with "stupid" with lines drawn all over her face. While online bullying can get so much worse than that, it was heartbreaking to see my daughter,

who is incredibly loyal to her small group of girlfriends, so devastated. To help her cope with these emotions, I had to think on my feet as I was finishing up a really busy workday full of video conference calls...I was emotionally spent and wasn't 100% sure I could help her with my full energy and presence. So, I simply asked her: "Based on what you believe in, what makes a great friend?"

Then a lightbulb went on for me. I had her grab a notebook and asked her to draw a line down the middle. She seemed interested in where I was going, and my energy picked up. On one side, I advised her to write out at the top of the page "What Makes a Good Friend." On the other side of the line, I had her title the second column "What is Unacceptable Behavior in a Friend?" I walked away to let her do her thing.

In less than ten minutes, she had both columns complete. And it was beautiful and thoughtful content. The list helped her guide the discussion—I was just asking questions and helping her clarify her own thoughts and beliefs. On the "good friend" side of the page, she listed out things like "laughs along with me at funny things," "is supportive," "is nice to me," "cheers me up when I'm sad," and "is there when I need her."

In the other column about unacceptable traits of a friend she wrote out "makes fun of me," "makes me feel bad about myself," "puts me down in front of other people," "lies to me," and "calls me names." Well, there you had it. I then asked my



daughter, “Do you think you could share with Zoe (real name withheld) that what she did today is not on your list of what makes a good friend, and let her know that if she does that again, you won’t be able to be friends with her anymore?” With her big eyes and soft voice, she nodded that she thought she could do that. And she did. And thankfully, the friendship is still going today and her friend ceased the online bullying immediately.

We all make mistakes. While my daughter’s friend mis-stepped and wasn’t a good friend on that particular day, goodness emerged from the situation and there was an incredible learning opportunity for my daughter to set her friendship boundaries. Perhaps her friend learned a life lesson too. My daughter and I continue to talk about that list.

How I wish someone had taught me at a young age to consciously and actively consider—and write down—what was acceptable and not acceptable for me in a relationship. My Mom and I did talk about my girlfriend friendships quite a bit, as she always had a compassionate ear, but we didn’t take it one step further to where I was able to formulate and articulate what I stood for, what I brought to a relationship, and what was cherished and what was unacceptable in a friendship.

Romantic relationships can be exponentially more complex when it comes to boundaries—physical, emotional and mental—that I was grossly underprepared to even set minor boundaries when it came to my relationships with men.

My college boyfriend's apartment was so disgusting you didn't even want to touch the toilet seat to put it down? Sure, baby, I'll spend the night with you!

Husband comes home drunk night after night because he's having "stress at work"? Sure, love, I'll suppress my disdain at your complete lack of maturity and self-control and let you just crash on the bed while I sleep next to you in tears and we'll talk about it in the morning!

Oh, you took out a second loan on our mortgage to buy a motorcycle without so much as a conversation and brought it home and insisted it would make you happier? Of course, husband, I'll just hold my anger inside and let you get away with that purchase we couldn't afford because what's done is done and the paperwork was already signed.

Bullshit—all of it.

I've done a lot of therapy to forgive the younger woman I was who could never seem to find her voice in the midst of relationship stress and chaos. And I can forgive her, because she just didn't know. She did not know that a concept called *boundaries* could be created, set, and vocalized. She didn't know that in vocalizing her boundaries and enforcing them for herself, she would be true to herself and love herself. She especially didn't understand that in setting boundaries and being authentically herself, the wrong men she attracted would mercifully leave

her life...for the better. That is where I really needed to make peace with younger Stefani and forgive her. She could have saved herself so much pain by loving herself first, and then taking her sweet time to discover a man who would respect her boundaries. Instead, she never even gave it a shot. She—I—fell in love and did not consciously decide where I began and ended—and allowed myself to fall right into relationships with men who would gladly take as much of my open-hearted, people-pleasing nature as I was willing to give them, until I literally had nothing left for myself.

This is why I'm making myself vulnerable and sharing some uncomfortable anecdotes with you, dear reader. While none of my experiences or years were a waste, because I have my life lessons as a result to share with all of you, there are better and more joyful ways to find the relationship that will fulfill your soul's deepest desire for a beautiful connection with another human. It is my life's purpose to share these learnings with you. While inevitably, we will all experience relationship pain or loss in one way or another, I feel in my heart that I can help you find your voice and your truth which will help you attract a great match from the very start (or get rid of a match that needs to take a hike for the sake of your long-term health, safety, and happiness!)

You probably have realized where I am going with this....and it's time to get going on those boundaries! Have you ever put your Dating Boundaries in writing? No? Well then, you are going to create some right now! Grab a pen or pencil, and on the follow-

ing pages, you will see a column for “What is a Good Partner to me?” and “What is Unacceptable Behavior from a Partner?”

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS EXERCISE:**

- If you are currently dating someone, try NOT to think of them as you write out your lists. I know that can be challenging, but you want to make this list as authentic to your beliefs and desires as possible...so temporarily forget the boyfriend while you do this exercise!
- If you are not dating someone right now, great! It should be easier for you to capture your thoughts without envisioning a current partner.
- Try to find a quiet place to write these lists out. Or go for a quick walk or workout first to clear your mind. You want these boundary lists to be informed by your soul...and by your heart. Try not to get too “into your head” with it.
- We are all influenced by the people who raised us and the communities in which we were raised. As you create these lists, try to filter out your true heart and soul beliefs from that which you’ve been told to believe. For example, I was raised Catholic and taught that sex before marriage was a sin, so I thought I valued finding a guy who was saving himself for marriage. Turns out, that was not really my own core belief, but that of my parents and the religion we

practiced. So just ask yourself: is this really my value, or someone else's? The truer of a list you can get, the more authentic and useful it will be to you!

### **Examples of Boundaries (to help you create your own):**

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- **Physical** - I am not okay with a man trying to kiss me on the first date.
- **Emotional** - It is unacceptable for someone to make me feel guilty about expressing my feelings about a situation.
- **Mental** - I will not date anyone who is sarcastic, because sarcasm confuses me and I don't know how to process it.
- **Financial** - I am good with offering to pay for a date, and I do want equality when it comes to paying for dates if the relationship continues.
- **Sexual** - Videoing or taking photos of sexual acts with my partner is not okay with me.
- **Moral** - I firmly believe in the equality of all, and it is unacceptable for a partner to use racial slurs.

Feel free to use the boundary categories above to help you create your lists, or add categories and subcategories that resonate with you and your values. This is a highly personal exercise. No two people's boundary lists will ever be the same. So be your unique self, listen to your inner voice, and go for it! Take your time—

this is important work and a HUGE gift you are giving to yourself! Boundary-setting takes courage; I'm so proud of you.

**Behavior & Qualities I Value  
in a Boyfriend**

**Unacceptable Behavior and  
Qualities in a Boyfriend**

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Welcome back and great job creating your Dating / Boyfriend Boundary List!

I wish I could talk to you about your list in person! (See my contact info at the back of this book—I'd love to hear from you!) I am eager to know what you value as acceptable and unacceptable behavior and qualities. I could talk to 1000 young women, and 1000 of you will have different lists because each of you have your own, unique soul. That's what makes boundary lists so important! They are unique to you and are only relevant to you.

Keep this list somewhere safe and use it as your compass. Take a picture and view it on your phone regularly. Read it before

you go on a date. Read it after six dates. Read it if you start to feel uneasy about where your new relationship is headed. Read it when you are in the midst of the most bliss you've ever experienced.

No matter how physically attracted you may be to your new love interest, or how charming he is, or how many friends he has that you like, this list will ground you to your specific beliefs and values. If you find that your relationship is moving into the “unacceptable behaviors” list, it is time to ask yourself if you are starting to compromise your beliefs, your authentic voice, and your values by staying in the relationship.

On the positive side, you can use this list as a health check! If your new love interest or boyfriend's behaviors, attitude, and treatment of you are living in the “behavior I value” column, that can give you confidence that at least—for now—you are aligned with someone who is feeding your heart-centered beliefs.

Entire books have been written on boundaries, and thank goodness for that. One of my new favorites is *Boundary Boss* by Terri Cole (Sounds True, 2021). She also has an excellent podcast. For some of you, this might be the very first time you've learned about boundaries or actively considered them. As you revisit this chapter and your boundaries, should you like more help understanding and setting boundaries, I highly recommend Terri's work. Learning to set boundaries is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and is truly an act of self-love.

There is no perfect formula for getting love or romantic relationships right. You are on a Live-Love-Learn journey, and that's one of the most beautiful things about your human experience. I hope this list-making exercise does, however, give you clarity into what YOU value and what YOU want and what you will and won't accept in a relationship. I speak from experience that sometimes the charm and charisma of a man can overshadow concerns or worries that are coming from your "gut." How I wish I would have created this list back when I was in college, because I know I would have had a clearer picture of the type of romantic love and person I wanted to attract into my life.

Your list can and likely will change over time as you grow and gain new life experiences. You might find yourself modifying your list as you move through your 20's and into your 30s. Take as much time as you need to get this right, and revisit your boundaries annually...perhaps on New Year's Day or your birthday each year. Keeping in tune with your boundaries will set you up for relationship success and give power to your authentic voice. While some of your boundaries will shift and change with each major life experience, there are just some core things to your heart that you should never change if they are important to you. Be aware of what is changeable and what is not, and this alone will increase your ability to attract and/or remove relationships that do not serve your heart!





**Compass Point:** Boundaries mean knowing where you begin and end. Without clear relationship boundaries that are true to you, you risk blurring the lines between you and your partner. With clear boundaries, you are empowered to know and use your authentic voice and express what you will and will not stand for in a relationship. Knowing your boundaries can help you attract the right person, and also remove the wrong people from your life. Setting boundaries is one of the biggest acts of self-love you can do for yourself!



# YOU ARE A SNOWFLAKE



## Set your standards accordingly

Standards. We hear this word thrown around in many ways: “Your standards are too high.” “Your standards are too low.” “You expect too much.” “Girl, you are *settling*.”

It can be really confusing to figure out what you truly, truly deserve in life and love. And figuring this out is so important.

I would like to share a personal story with you about my twenties and setting dating and love standards. Oh wait...that’s right, I didn’t consciously set any standards! I projected into the future! I got married right out of college! I got divorced five years later! The end. 😊

In present day, my first ex-husband and I are amicable and we have raised our daughter well. I have no regrets regarding my first marriage experience because I loved, I learned, I grew and

I got my amazing daughter as a result. However, in hindsight my first husband should have probably just been a wonderful, long-term boyfriend. We would have broken up as careers and life started to teach both of us lessons that pulled us in different directions. Unfortunately, we were tied to an engagement and then marriage. I did not know my relationship standards at that time; how could I have possibly thought I was ready for marriage?

Remember in Chapter 3 when I urged you to start living in the present and stop projecting into your future life? That is exactly what I did not do in college. I fell in love with my handsome first husband during a college internship. Since we had the most amazing chemistry and SO much to talk about, already into the first month of dating I started projecting us into the future as husband and wife.

Nobody ever taught me to write down a list of standards for myself about relationships (yet I had dozens of lists for school, career, and daily to-do's!) Instead, I latched onto the standards that girls around me said were important. Or what my Mom had told me was important to her. Or what people at my church talked about. I wasn't thinking entirely for myself, even though I would have sworn to you that I was.

In this chapter, I am urging you to begin thinking about your standards for romantic love...not your parents' standards, not your sister's standards, not your best friend's standards. We are each unique. You are a snowflake.

According to a Library of Congress, “Everyday Mysteries” article, “*The scientific consensus states that the likelihood of two large snow crystals being identical is zero.*”<sup>1</sup> ZERO! This analogy should empower you to understand that what is important to your heart is going to be different from your best friend’s heart, or your roommate’s heart, or your mother’s heart. Your standards are uniquely your own. If you know your standards clearly, you have an incredible chance at attracting another unique snowflake into your life who will value your uniqueness and complement you with their uniqueness too.

So, how should you go about setting relationship standards for yourself, my dear snowflake? In the previous chapter, we focused on boundaries. Knowing your boundaries enables you to have clarity around acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a relationship. It is important to realize the differences between boundaries and standards.

Thomas Leonard, a major contributor to the development of personal coaching and founder of Coach U, summarized Standards and Boundaries in a simple and profound way: “A Standard is a YES and a Boundary is a NO.” He says, “Boundaries are what you have determined that other people or environments cannot do TO you. Standards, however, are the behavior/excellence that you naturally hold yourself to.”<sup>2</sup>

Here are some examples of Standards that apply the “yes” principle:

- “Yes, my standard is spirituality.”
- “Yes, honesty is important to me”
- “Yes, I like my spaces neat and clean.”
- “Yes, I choose authenticity over sarcasm.”
- “Yes, my standard is good physical health and vitality.”

Florence Doisneau, a certified life coach and the owner of Realize Unlimited, LLC, insightfully shares this: *“Standards are where we as humans have been given the opportunity to become great, to develop into our highest selves. They are how we choose to get better and our lives get better as we raise them. It is important to invest efforts and challenge ourselves in raising standards that truly reflect who we are, otherwise, it only becomes another “should” to the already long list we may have. It is interesting to match our standards with our needs. As we do so, our needs that tend to drive us will disappear and be replaced by peace of mind and a strong sense of self.”*<sup>3</sup>

When I was dating, I let my needs dictate my choices, instead of defining my standards and my YES’s first. Of course, there were some standards I innately knew and lived by, but I never took the time to draw them out and practice them consciously and mindfully. This lack of mindful attention to my standards created a wavering in me any time my standards were challenged, based on who I wanted to people-please or win over. My Love Compass was spinning madly, with no true direction.

I wanted to “win over” my first husband. So, as his lifestyle and values began challenging some of mine, I wavered. This happened in my second marriage with my second husband as well. The universe and my soul put me through TWO marriages so I’d finally wake up and pay attention. Do I have a list of standards now? You bet I do. I would be giving the universe a big middle finger if I did not—she has taught me well and lovingly, so I must love myself enough to take the time to write out my standards. And you, my beautiful girl, must do the same.

My prayer for you is that you invest in understanding yourself so deeply right now, that when you are trying to figure out your dating interest, your boyfriend, your possible fiancé and husband...you are so clear on your boundaries and standards that you are led to the right choice for *you*. And nothing is perfect. Just because you define your boundaries and standards clearly doesn’t mean that you will never have any relationship issues or that your partner will tick every box. Relationships are intended to help us grow and learn. The minute you stop learning, you stop living; so, move forward with courage, do the best you can in committing to your head and your heart what you care about, and be optimistic about love! My intention is to give you the best shot at finding a love that resonates with your heart for the season that you are in.

**EXERCISE:**

**DEFINING MY STANDARDS**

*Instructions:* Now it is time to get out that pen again and put to paper Your Standards. This exercise is all about you. Use this page or your journal or a blank sheet of paper. Then, use the example Yes standards on page 60 and fill in standards that are important to you.

**My Standards (What do I say “yes” to?)**

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Congratulations! Now you have consciously and intentionally considered your standards and have a written list to which you can refer to time and again when you start to feel a little lost in a relationship or need strength and peace of mind.



**Compass Point:** So far, you have learned about being mindful and present so you can pay attention and absorb what is unfolding before you, to stop projecting too far into the future, to begin defining relationship boundaries for yourself and to consciously understand your standards. This is important work you are doing! Do a happy dance because you are rocking this book. You are a beautiful and unique SNOWFLAKE! Now... we move onto how other people constitute those ever-present “voices in your head” that can distract you from your authentic self.



## OTHER PEOPLE



### Discerning the difference between your voice and theirs

Ladies, I am a good two and a half decades of life lived ahead of you, but I can promise you that there is at least one thing that remains constant from decade to decade: the voices in your head of the people who raised you. For many women, sometimes the loudest voice is that of their mother's. However, I know several women who have been trying to earn their father's approval for years. You may choose to embrace these familial voices or ignore these voices, but believe me, your subconscious is replaying them constantly. This is why it is so important to have an awareness of exactly *whose* voice is influencing or even guiding your relationship decisions.

Dr. Howard Halpern, psychotherapist and author of the book, *Cutting Loose: An Adult's Guide to Coming to Terms with Your Parents*, writes:

*“We’re adults. We’ve got all the credentials and scars to show for it. ...But a grown-up is supposed to possess himself, to be his own person, to make decisions according to his wishes and his best judgment. Too often we find that this is not the case with us. Frequently we are so limited by habitual ways of acting and thinking, so needful of the approval of others, and so afraid of their disapproval that we don’t own ourselves at all. We are like a corporation that has gone public, and other people own controlling shares. And for many of us in that position, the biggest shareholders are our parents. [...]*

*The parent-child relationship is a primary source of who we are, and the mutual emotional attachments are derived from countless interactions, conscious and hidden memories, and profound feelings that go back to our days of oneness with them.”<sup>1</sup>*

It can take many sessions with a therapist to peel back the layers of your childhood and upbringing to understand how your parents’ voices (or lack of voices) have impacted your view of romantic relationships, dating, and marriage. Even the most loving and caring parents in the most positive of environments project onto you their beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. These projections, and sometimes outright edicts, for how one should live their life cannot be prevented. This is simply what happens when a child is carried by his or her mother and born into this world and experiences life through the actions, words, religious and cultural beliefs of the people raising said child.

Now that you are out on your own in the world, learning how to navigate life and relationships independently, discovering

the difference between what you want and what everyone else wants for you are the keys to your happiness. Sometimes you can even think what you've been raised to believe is truly what you believe, and it's not. Conversely, you can also be raised to believe certain things and genuinely, from the bottom of your truest heart, believe those things to be true. The awareness of whether or not the belief you hold is truly your own is where the rubber meets the road, and there is nothing quite like a romantic relationship to challenge what you believe in!

A very basic personal example I can share of this belief system is regarding the Catholic religion's guidance that sex before marriage is a sin. (This is not necessarily an exclusive belief to Catholics...many American and world religions hold this belief). I was raised to believe that sex was reserved for marriage alone. So naturally, I translated this "*Okay, then the first guy I really, really want to have sex with is hopefully going to be the guy I'm going to marry.*" I was no virgin on my (first) wedding night, but I did marry the first guy I slept with so I could somehow uphold what my religion and parents had taught me. This was a huge mistake, and as it turns out, I do not personally ascribe to the belief that sex should be reserved for marriage only. Obviously, I wanted to have sex before marriage, and so I did. But I heard my parental voices in my head and I think I felt more compelled to marry my first husband because of this. I was not listening to my own voice, or...you could say I was listening to my own, real voice in secret, and then denying my voice so much so that I kept up

the momentum towards marriage to “even out” with my parents’ and church leaders’ voices in my head. My first husband should have been my great “first” and the relationship should have run a natural course ending with a breakup probably somewhere around the age of twenty-four. Instead, I put a ring on it...ha!

And for those of you choosing to abstain from sex before marriage—that is a wonderful choice if it is true to your heart. But I wasn’t making that choice—or near-choice—for myself. It was not an authentic Stefani choice. Rather it was a “this is what I’ve been taught to do so I better do it” choice. At the time, I didn’t even realize I was navigating my love compass according to the navigational map of my parents. They were never heavy-handed; this course of falling in love and getting married was just quietly expected. It was just what you did in our broader family culture: you met someone in college or early 20s, fell in love, got married, had sex, and made babies. There is nothing inherently wrong with this path; in fact, I have several friends who took a similar path and absolutely love their lives and their partners to this day. For me, my voice was new and precarious, and it just wasn’t strong enough to override the louder voices in my head that had already put what I thought was the right plan in motion. I didn’t know whose voice I was listening to.

Do you know what voice you are listening to when it comes to your relationship choices? Can you hear the echoes in your head where your Dad might be telling you that only a doctor or

attorney is good enough to provide for his daughter, or where your Mom might be saying that marriage did her a disservice and you'd be best to never get married and focus on your career instead? Do you hear a minister or priest admonishing you about your sexual preferences and desires? Do you feel shame when you think about what your Mom or Dad would say if they knew how many sexual partners you've had? Does your older sister think you should have had sex by now and thinks you are crazy for not dating more? Can you hear your life-long best friend from age five telling you that your friendship should come before any and all boyfriends? None of these questions (or answers) are right or wrong in and of themselves. I write them out so you can become aware of what voices are guiding the feelings you have about your relationships. One of the most important things you can ever do—right now—is begin to figure out whose voices are guiding you.

I will share another personal story to illustrate how these familial relationships can impact decisions in your personal life without you even being aware of it. I was raised by very loving parents, deeply rooted in religious faith, who were always generous and kind to friends, neighbors, co-workers and most importantly... to my younger sister and me. My Mom always told me she loved me, taught me beautifully and patiently about everything from music to math, and instilled in me the belief I could be anything in this world I wanted to be. My Dad rolled up his sleeves to help me with every science project I ever had, gave abundant

affection, showed me his love through acts of kindness and help, and perhaps most importantly treated my mom with incredible chivalry and affection. Our family laughed a lot. I had a peaceful and positive home life, with just the occasional “uh-oh, Mom and Dad are mad at each other” look exchanged between my sister and me because, let’s face it...marriage is TOUGH and arguments occur in even the happiest of marriages, which my parents certainly have had and to this day are still crazy in love with each other.

However, while I was programmed with so many messages of positivity, faith and love, I later realized some important things after spending time with my insightful therapist during the dissolution and ending of my second marriage.

For me, one of my subconscious (through my 20’s and 30’s) voices told me this: “If I overachieve, I get even more love! Lots of love and acceptance! Therefore, doing things well helps me earn love. And when I’m a ‘good girl’ and obey the rules of my family and my religion, I’m loved because I’m doing what everyone wants me to do.” From these cues and the encouragement of parents and religion, my subconscious gave me this: *To be loved, I must do good things*. Oh boy—I could write another book on just that single lesson. While my parents were only trying to encourage me to be a good Christian and praise me for doing a good job, my Mom especially lit up with pride and happiness at specific things I achieved, and my subconscious latched onto this like a moth to a flame.



Sometimes my Mom experienced mood swings (ha, don't all Moms?! I'm a Mom now and can totally validate the ups and downs of living with your children!). Therefore, I knew if my Mom was having a down day, all I had to do was bring home that report card with a 4.0 GPA and I would get praise and see any down mood she was experiencing turn into happiness. Guess what? This "recording" in my head played out through the course of two marriages as I just kept "doing" more to earn love from my husbands. If I made more money, then I would get praise and he would love me more. If I bought him an awesome autographed piece of sports memorabilia, then I would put him in a great mood and get fun love and affection for a week. If he didn't like that I wasn't as neat and tidy in my housekeeping as he was, I'd clean up quickly before he walked in the door to earn his praise for doing a "good job." I thought I could give my husbands a great day or lift them out of a bad mood by doing something fantastic. The key distinguishing phrase right there is that I *thought* I could.

It has taken me years to learn that I am not responsible for other people's thoughts or feelings. For those of us who have people-pleasing tendencies, those tendencies can be further inflated by our own thinking that we are responsible for our partner or loved one's moods, experiences or life views. In fact, you can find yourself listening to the voices of your loved ones in your head more than your very own. This is where things get dicey in a romantic partnership if you can't hear your own voice to guide your decisions and choices.

Now I know better, and I can replace the voice in my head from my childhood that played over and over into my adulthood that told me that I must do good things in order to be loved. I am aware of my tendency to do this, and I've discovered that a remarkable, soul-level partner will not allow you to overdo, because they love you for who you are, not what you do! My new, updated core value in a relationship is that a man will love me for simply existing, not because of what I do. I no longer need "to do" in order to win his love or affection. This means I can show up as my authentic self. Now when I'm dating someone, I have toned down the people-pleasing and trying to impress him with my accomplishments. I can relax into the core of my authentic self.

I'm so happy that I'm now with an incredible man who loves that authentic Stefani without the added bells and whistles. In fact, when I start to fall into old habits and begin doing too much, he actually stops me and asks me to sit with him so he can hold and kiss me. Because he just wants me for me, and not for what I do. It's an incredible gift. I do want to point out that he did not come into my life until I did the work laid out in this very book. It is funny how that happens, isn't it? We learn hard lessons, acquire wisdom, become aware of why past relationships failed, and do the work to know ourselves more deeply. After I'd done the work to up-level and stop living to please the men I was with, and to love myself and listen to my own voice first, the right partner literally walked into my life...completely

unexpectedly. When you up-level yourself, you also up-level the man you attract!

The absence of a voice during your youth can also have an impact on your partner choices as an adult. Like my Mom, my Dad was incredibly loving and always supporting my dreams. I told him in 4<sup>th</sup> grade—right after the tragic space shuttle Challenger explosion—that one day, I'd be an astronaut. He never doubted my dedication. He even helped me build a model space station for a class I was in, listening to my design suggestions quite seriously and supportively. He and my Mom saved quietly and surprised me with a trip to Space Camp—a childhood dream come true. But when it came to male relationships, my Dad never gave me any vocal advice, other than to say that one day, I would find the right guy. (Just as he did so lovingly in the story that opened this book). My Dad meant absolutely zero harm in his more passive approach to dating advice. He was letting me be my own person and respecting my independence. I assumed I should just find a man like my Dad, and that would be a great match for me.

My Dad was a crime scene detective for over two decades; one of the best in our state. I thought every man in police work would inevitably share the same values as my wonderful Dad. When I met my first husband, he was in college getting his degree in Criminal Justice and yep...you guessed it...aiming to be a police officer. The voice in my head told me, “My Dad was a police

officer and the most kind and honorable man I know. Therefore, I am *sure* this man will have the same values and heart as my Dad.” I completely skipped the “getting to know you deeply” phase because I *assumed* that this man would function well in a relationship with me because I am my mother’s daughter and my Dad was a great match for her.

While I wish my Dad might have been more vocal about my engagement to a future police officer, he is actually one not to overstep boundaries, which I appreciate. My Dad was just not the kind of guy who, in the 1980s and 1990s, was going to have a heart to heart with his daughter about male-female relationships. My Dad lives his life by example, and I truly believe that he figured I would find a good man like he was to my Mom. Unfortunately, I just couldn’t figure out how to replicate that for myself for a long time.

Through sharing these very personal stories with you, my intention is that you become aware that the presence or even absence of a specific voice from the people who raise you, even with the most loving of intentions, can have a huge impact on the dynamics of your romantic relationships. What I hope for you is that you do not have to wait two and a half decades and experience the pain of multiple divorces or break-ups to begin consciously becoming aware of the voices in your head from your upbringing.

It is also important to note that many of these inner voices you hear are great! We are put on this earth to learn, and our parents and family can be some of our greatest and most important teachers. We want to carry forth all of the good things we've learned from them. I can still hear my Grandma's voice echoing through my head with her often-spoken wisdom, "If you have your health, you have everything." I'm so glad to hear her voice, because good health is important to me and she was so right. That voice has kept me on track with my health and motivates me to work out and fuel my body with beneficial food choices. I am especially appreciative of my Mom's voice saying, "Wear your sunscreen!" because thanks to her, my skin is healthy and I am frequently told I do not look my age. My Dad always cautioned me to never leave my garage door open and to take valuables off my front seat—and my home and my car have always been safe places for me. My Mom and Dad also both told me that "you can be anything you want to be," and here I am, becoming an author and a relationship coach for young women! (Unfortunately, I had to give up the astronaut dream once I realized I was claustrophobic while climbing into a mock-up shuttle cabin at Space Camp, ha ha.). The point is that it is now time for you to step up and actively begin discerning which voices are true for you, and which ones are simply projections of your parents' experiences of life and relationships.

Have you made choices that were because of voices in your head—from institutions or parents or highly influential siblings,

relatives or friends—that weren't truly coming from your own heart? It is so important that you really begin paying attention to what is *your* voice and what is someone else's voice. Remember that earlier chapter in this book about being present? Being present and in the moment is critical to ensuring that you are able to discern whose voice you are following. Is it the magnetic pull of the true north on your compass calling you to a particular relationship choice, or is it your Mom saying "Keep an eye out for a great husband while you are in college!" or your Dad warning that "All men just want one thing!" or your older brother telling you that "All college men are idiots and none of them can be trusted?"

What is YOUR voice saying? What is YOUR belief about men (or the sex/gender you are attracted to)? What is YOUR belief about the pace of a relationship? What is YOUR standard for how you want to show love physically?

In fact, this leads to a great journaling exercise, and a very important one. It's time to get that pen ready again!

**EXERCISE:**

**WHOSE VOICE IS IT?**

In the space below, write out ONE voice or message that you suspect is not your own, but comes from a parent or another adult that has influenced you while growing up. What did this voice or message tell you about romantic relationships?

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Now, strike out or X-out this message above (It's powerful! And fun! Try it!) Below, write out YOUR belief about this specific aspect of a relationship:

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I hope that felt good! If it did and you want to keep going, get another piece of paper or your journal and keep going until you've worked through some voice discernment! This is YOUR authentic voice shining through, and it is empowering and exciting to hear it. Please also note that this is not a one-time exercise; I can assure you that voices are going to continue to emerge as you go through different phases of life. (Raising children will *really* bring out the voices—buckle your seatbelt!)

To be clear, there are wonderful messages from institutions, cultures, religions, spiritual practices and adult influencers during your childhood that you should keep if they resonate with your soul. There are many, many good voices, but distinguishing the intent of the voice and its meaning for you is key.

I'll share with you two of my favorite voices. The first is that of my beloved high school band teacher, Mrs. Linda Wegmann. She always said to us, "If you are on time, you're late!" And you know what? For all of my life, that has resonated as true. I have been in corporate America for twenty-two years and counting. Her voice saved my tail several times from being late to a VIP meeting due to some last-minute parking garage mishap or the time I realized I had started my period on the way to an important sales meeting and had to stop off at Walgreens for tampons. Yep, thanks to Mrs. Wegmann, I always had time built in and was never late. I developed a stellar reputation at my companies for being a professional that could be counted upon to show up and deliver. Thank you again, Mrs. Wegmann.



A second favorite voice was that of a parish priest we had who was so inspirational and kind to all...Father Joe. He was fresh out of seminary and had so much love for God. He told us little first graders that Jesus loved it when we sang, because our voices went straight up to Heaven. And for me, this rang so true. Any time I sang as a child in church, performed solos as a teenager, or sang at weddings as an adult, I could and can still feel this high vibration resonate through my bones that tells me—I am one with God and the universe when I'm singing. Thank you for that voice, Father Joe.

And how do those two stories translate into relationships? For me, I show respect to a partner when I'm ready to go somewhere and thus am on time for a date. I love music and I want a partner who will go to concerts and shows with me and enjoy me playing the piano and singing for him. These two voices and values ring true for me, and therefore will ensure I am authentically being the real me with my partner.

I hope this chapter helps to encourage the beginning of your life-long journey of getting in touch with the voices in your head that have been deeply implanted since you were a baby.



**Compass Point:** You are in the driver's seat of your relationship car, and it is now up to you to discern which voices you will carry forth into your relationships and which ones to which you lovingly say "thanks, but no thanks" and X them out of your thinking patterns. As this part could be a deeply touching, and sometimes painful thing to extract and figure out, I highly recommend working with a licensed therapist when you have the means and the need for this conversation. You are a young woman with the exciting road ahead of exploring different relationships to learn and grow. You may though, one day, be interested in exploring your romantic relationships with a therapist. If you do, trust me—you'll spend some time talking about your parents and other influential adults who raised you! My hope and prayer for you is that you have the presence, clarity, and courage to be truly who you are, and stop worrying so much about what everyone else thinks. You have a good heart. Listen to it—it will tell you what voice is authentically yours and what is not.

## CHOOSING LOVE



It doesn't always mean what  
you think it means

The summer after my second divorce, I dipped my toe in the dating waters. And after several first dates that led to nothing, I connected with a guy through a dating app. He was athletic and fit, tall and handsome, rugged and masculine yet refined, had incredible hair and a sexy beard....and most importantly, was so chivalrous and kind and big-hearted and intelligent. As we continued on to our third, fourth, and fifth dates, I was enjoying every minute and attracted to this man in every way. He was attentive and always present when we were together—giving me his full attention. I was able to give him the same and it was so easy to just be with him and to be myself with him. I was applying everything I had learned about relationships—being my authentic, true self. Doing and saying only what was authentic to me, not pretending, not people-pleasing. Fully and completely in myself and listening to my own voice.

As we continued into about week seven of dating, I felt something shift—the momentum we were building as we got to know each other intimately, both emotionally and physically, had reached some sort of plateau. He was still being kind, acting as if he was still into me, and his texts were sweet, yet...I felt a barrier. And then I noticed a pulling away of sorts. The meaningful conversations ended, texts slowed down, he cancelled a date at the last-minute and also scheduled over a weekend plan we previously had made. It was time for me to address this change directly and honestly.

And so, I did. I calmly expressed that I was starting to feel like I wasn't a priority for him and asked him if something was going on, giving him an opportunity to express if he wasn't into me anymore, had met someone else, or even just simply that he didn't have time to date with everything he was juggling at work and with his own kids. My questioning elicited a somewhat defensive response from him—I figured it would and it made me uncomfortable when that happened, but I knew I needed to be true to myself—after all, that's why I'm writing this book! I had to take my own advice. He countered with, "Of course, you are a priority for me" and he came up with specific examples to prove his point, and he even said "I'm sorry." And yet, something was still missing. My intuition was yelling at me loudly that something wasn't right. During all of that back-and-forth, he never once said how he wanted me in his life moving forward, how he craved more time with me, or how he was really feeling or

thinking about our growing relationship. He didn't fight to keep me, yet he wasn't using break-up words either. I decided I deserved more than his ambiguity. In the spirit of the theme of this book, dear reader, I decided to love myself first. So, I made the move to text him and end it. And for the record, I do not advocate breaking off a relationship that has been meaningful via text. There were some specific reasons I chose to text that I won't get into here for sake of his privacy.

So, I texted him this: *“Hi, I wish we could have talked about this in person but I wasn't sure when we would be able to reconnect again. I would have rather hugged you goodbye, as I have a lot of affection for you. I think we are in two different places in terms of what you are able to give and in what I need to feel connected and fulfilled. It's nobody's fault. I'm out here rooting for your success and happiness in life. It's hard to say goodbye to you and I will miss you.”*

To which he again replied with something about coordinating dates and scheduling mishaps, yet again, not expressing anything to the effect of not wanting us to end or that he would miss me. He did finish the text with well wishes for me, so it was not contentious or angry. He could have not made his text angry anyway, because the intention behind my break-up with him came from a place of love—love for myself and loving / kindness towards him. (More about Intention in an upcoming chapter!) I decided to send that text from a place of love and not anger. I expressed what I needed, that he couldn't meet that, and it was time to move on.

Would the Stefani of the past have hung on to the relationship when I knew something was “off?” Would I have swept it under the rug and/or tried to keep the peace? You bet I would have. In fact, that’s exactly what I did many times in my marriages and previous romantic relationships.

Now here is where the story REALLY gets good. Less than a month after our breakup, he accidentally sends me a text intended for someone else. Immediately after, he follows it with a text that says: *“I’m so sorry. This was meant for someone else. I’m so embarrassed.”* Reading between the lines of the first text, it was obvious he was trying to figure out if he was straight or gay and had done some experimentation with another man the previous evening. I had some hunches about this, but we are talking about an incredibly masculine man who does masculine things, like with guns, cowboy boots and sports. There was also a cognitive dissonance as I was dating him. I picked up on hints—things he said admiringly about men in his life he had great affection for, a certain vibe in the bedroom that was a little different than with the men I’d been with before...but nothing truly “obvious.” He was an incredible kisser and cuddler and made me feel safe and secure.

Instead of ignoring his accidental text or even further being angry, I decided to stay in a loving mindset. After a few hours of quiet, I felt some divine inspiration and texted him this: *“It’s okay. Please do not be embarrassed. My intuition told me you are in*

*the process of trying to figure some things out. You deserve love and happiness. Being human is not always easy...we are all here to learn and help each other along the way. You are a good soul. I wish you all the best in your journey, my friend. Take care of yourself and be well.”*

To my surprise, he responded immediately. What then resulted was an hour and a half of true, honest discussion; his curiosity about my intuition, his need for something different emotionally and sexually, the sharing of what I had observed in our brief relationship, honest dialogue, what he had already been thinking and feeling regarding his sexuality...and for the first time ever during that Saturday morning conversation, he was able to say the words out loud: “I am gay.” I was the first person on planet earth to whom he ever uttered those words, and it was freeing for him and healing for us both.

Wow, even as I write this, so many emotions are stirred up within me and tears spring into my eyes.

#### **HERE IS WHAT I LEARNED:**

- I represented my true, authentic self in this relationship. I expressed what I needed. When my partner could not meet my needs, I followed my intuition and said goodbye. I said goodbye lovingly, at the same time choosing to love myself first. I remembered and practiced: Love thy neighbor AS thyself.

- God/Spirit/Universe presented me with an opportunity to virtually embrace this man with kindness and compassion as he accidentally sent a text that made him feel embarrassed and ashamed.
- Through my intention of compassion and love—even with someone who had hurt me—this incredible man, this soulful human being, was able to come out for the very first time in his life as gay. And I got to be there as a facilitator and a witness to a beautiful release of embarrassment as he decided to courageously take his first steps into living HIS true and authentic life with courage. (I also recommended a professional counselor with experience in this transition so he could be fully supported by someone who can guide him on this journey).
- I gained a lifelong friend with a new, completely honest and transparent understanding of each of our spirits. Clearly, we were attracted to each other for a reason; little did either of us know it would lead to such a significant milestone and awakening for us both.

It is such a beautiful story that I can barely tell it without deep emotion and tears, because if we love ourselves, and we love each other, we all get EXACTLY what we need. While I found myself mourning the loss of this amazing man as a boyfriend for a brief period of time in my life, I rekindled a relationship in the form of a deeply meaningful friendship that is going to last forever. I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for this experience. I



share this deeply personal story with a promise to you: if you live your authentic truth, love yourself, and treat others with love and compassion, you will encounter the opportunity to weave yourself into the awe-inspiring fabric of the human experience and write your own incredible story.



**Compass Point:** The next time you find yourself in a relationship where something is not quite right, you aren't getting your needs met, the person you are with puts up a barrier, or you feel like you cannot love them fully because of your intuition...lead with love. Love yourself enough to share your truth. Those that are ready will share their truth back with you. For those who aren't ready or who shut down or shut you out, or make you feel shameful for expressing what you need, send them thoughts of kindness and compassion and move on. You never know when that love you gave might be exactly what you and your former partner needed to move on and become more whole versions of yourselves. Love transcends gender, sexual preference, race, creed, religions...love is everything. Keep moving forward in love and giving out love. So much love will find you back.



# EMBRACING YOUR SINGLEDOM



It's actually pretty rewarding

*"My alone feels so good, I'll only have you  
if you're sweeter than my solitude."*

-WARSAN SHIRE,  
goodhousekeeping.com

*"Dance with God until He lets someone cut in."*

@INSTAGODSGIRL

*"Yes, I'm single. And you'll have to be amazing to change  
that."*

-SOURCE UNKNOWN,  
iliketoquote.com

**B**eing "single" has several connotations. Some of you might wear the title as a badge of honor, illustrating your independence. Some of you equate the word "single" with "fun!"

Some of you might cringe when you hear the word because you so badly want to be part of a couple.

When I started my college years, I fell into the last category of disliking the word “single”. Now, I look back at Stefani in her 20’s and want to tell her how amazing it is to be single! If you can believe this, I did not actually embrace being single until after my second divorce. (I think I emerged from my mother’s womb wanting to be in a relationship. I remember daydreaming about this boy in my preschool class named Jim and how I wanted to get married at the ripe old age of four!!) It was finally at the age of forty-four when I found myself thrilled to not only *not* be in a relationship, but to enjoy the freedom of not having to find one! I took the time to find new projects, to practice meditation, to learn about blocked chakras, to exercise, and to enjoy my daughters and my girlfriends. I learned how to hang pictures and paint my fireplace in my new house (with the help of my sister!). I re-connected with old friends I hadn’t seen since high school. I took my daughters out for lunch and shopping and to their lessons and deliberately didn’t seek out the “chance meeting” with the man of my dreams. I wore sweatpants and no make-up to run to the grocery store, not caring what anyone thought (no make-up was a big deal...I am very much a girly-girl, just ask my friends). It felt so good to simply enjoy being *me* and to practice gratitude for all of the wonderful people I had and still have in my life.

When you do find love, rest assured that your schedule will become very busy! Think about all of the things you do now if

you are single: the people you spend time with, the errands you run, the hobbies and studies you try to fit in during a day. On top of all of this, when you do match up with a new love interest, you are now going to want to spend a lot of time with that person. Therefore, I cannot emphasize this enough...*enjoy the time you have now being single!*

It might be hard to believe this now, but singledom is a true gift! Why? Let's recap some of the lessons in this book and then add a few more to the list:

- You have time to write out your values and relationship boundaries, and consciously discover what is important to you in a romantic partnership! This time is GOLDEN and it is a GIFT.
- You have time to cultivate your friendships—both of the same and of the opposite gender. How awesome it is to live fully present with your friends, go out with them or stay in together, plan some fun weekend-get-aways, take the time to give and receive the gift of friendship.
- You have time to date yourself! Woo-hoo! You can choose the movie you want to see, the museum you want to explore, the hobby you've always wanted to try...the world is your oyster to open and discover.
- You have time to help others! Volunteer, lend a friendly ear to someone in need, write letters for social justice causes

you care about, say a prayer for someone who needs help, send a thank-you note to someone who has shaped your life positively. Give, and you will receive more than you could predict in unexpected and life-changing ways.

- You have time to discover your own voice, what you want to do with your life, what morals and values you want to live your life by, what adventures you want to experience and how you want to *be* in this beautiful life that is all yours to live, shape and experience! You have that golden opportunity to find your true North.
- Most importantly—you have time to love yourself and appreciate YOU for the amazing and incredible soul that you are. Find ten minutes to meditate on gratitude for where you are in life or take a walk outside on a beautiful day and focus on the good things in your life and offer up a thank you to the universe. Nurture your soul in ways that matter to you.

### EXERCISE

What are some ways in which you can enjoy being single, right now? In recognizing that once you are part of a romantic partnership, a large majority of your time will be allocated to that relationship; what can you do now with the time you have to show yourself love or to show love to others who matter to you?

Capture your ideas here:

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An example from the ending of my second marriage is that I decided to use my singledom to begin playing piano again. I used to be *really* good at the piano. As a tween, I memorized and performed full Beethoven Sonatas. Looking back at the pages I used to play, it's hard to fathom how I accomplished all of that. I realized I missed being able to play beautiful classical music with ease. So, I got out my old Beethoven book, measures marked up from old competitions, and I began practicing my favorite pieces

again. Once I started, I couldn't stop. After my second marriage, I found myself spending hours at the piano, and my heart filled up with genuine joy.

Here is the incredible universe and God at work: I'm so glad I took that time to practice piano, because the man who then walked into my life is a musician! I spent my valuable, priceless single time honing a true passion, and I think that becoming even more authentically me invited a fellow musician into my life. I now have this musically talented boyfriend and as we spend a lot of time together, I still find time to play because he loves to listen, and making music alone and also together has been healing for my soul.

Do what you authentically love while you are single and you have the time...you never know how it might carry into the future in deeply meaningful ways! The more you nurture your true passions and interests when you are single, the higher your vibration rises and the more likely the right mate for you is going to sail into your life with ease. And even if you remain single for years, you aren't ruminating on what you don't have. Instead, you are living your life to its fullest. The time will come for your next relationship. I know it is not easy to have patience when you crave romance or a partner, but taking the time to make investments in yourself will bring you the right partner at the right moment.





**Compass Point:** Being single has so many advantages. Instead of focusing on the fact that you don't have a romantic relationship, embrace all of the opportunities you have to discover and focus on the things you love, volunteering for charities or special causes, and spending time with cherished friends. Reveling in the time you have while not dating contributes to the spirit of loving yourself. Of course, you can still do all of these wonderful things once you find yourself in a relationship, but dating does take up time, so embrace the time you have now to enhance your life and have fun being single!



## DATE YOURSELF



Let's start a movement!

*"The best part about being alone is that you really don't have to answer to anybody. You do what you want."*

-JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

*"You're only lonely if you're not there for you."*

-DR. PHIL MCGRAW

In this crazy, busy, social media-driven world, have you ever taken the time to be alone and take yourself on a solo date? Does that sound like a ridiculous proposition to you? I'm going to challenge you to give this a try, because if you don't know how to date yourself, how can you expect others to date you well?

Dating yourself is another aspect of the self-love we've been discussing in this book. And not many young women take the time to do it. Yet, being present and experiencing how you move through

the world in social settings while you are without a partner can be one of the most empowering and confidence-building exercises you will ever experience.

As a young woman, you've always been surrounded by people. Family, friends, classrooms, parties, road trips, spring break, sorority socials, clubs. Do you know what it's like to just be with yourself?

Let's start a "Date Yourself" movement! I dare you to take on a date day or date night with yourself, and here are the steps of the challenge:

- **Plan your date in advance and put it on your calendar.**
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Know exactly when you are going to leave and the first place you will go. Check your weather app to ensure your choice of date location(s) and attire match the forecast. Think about your transportation and how you will get to/from your date spot(s) and back home. And safety first—tell a trusted friend where you are going and what time to expect your "end of date" text. It's best to avoid texting or social media during your self date (let's be fully present!) but definitely text your designated safety friend if you are changing locations or plans. Knowing you have a friend who is actively watching for your safety updates will give you peace of mind.

- **Pick safe public places, please.**

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Again, safety first. Do not wander in areas of a town or city with which you aren't familiar if they are "off the beaten path." It's okay to explore a cool new street with lots of cafes or an avenue with some great shopping, but my point is to always be public and visible for your safety.

- **Commit to staying off of text and social media (other than your safety updates to your trusted friend).**

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Holding our phones/smart devices is beyond a habit...it's an addiction. Popping open apps, constant Snapchats, Instagram alerts, etc., all draw our attention away from where we are at and what we are doing. In advance of your date, decide how you will mute your alerts, take a little bag or purse to put your phone in during your date, and find a substitute for technology if you don't feel comfortable simply sitting at a table (if your date is a solo meal) without something "to do." You could grab a magazine (they still sell those!), a newspaper (those too!), a new book, or bring a journal to write in. These tactile comforts can serve as your social safety blanket if you've never truly been alone at a table. If your date is an active one, such as walking through the halls of a museum or gallery, you may not need a tactile "thing" to look at or have in your hands, but a small notebook and a pen can be very reassuring to have in your bag just in case you need to reach for something.

- **Prepare for your date.**

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For some of you more outgoing personalities, this self-date thing will be a piece of cake. For others, the very prospect of going to a restaurant alone to date yourself sounds absolutely terrifying. Good! That feeling of anxiety means you need to do this self-dating thing the most. I assure you that you are going to emerge a new woman after this self-date because if you can be alone with yourself and have some fun, you are going to begin to exude confidence that is so attractive that guys will notice and be drawn to it.

- **Get cute for your date.**

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If it is dinner and a movie, get dressed in an outfit you love and that makes you feel good in your own skin. If you enjoy putting on make-up, do it! If you prefer no make-up but love to have pretty nails, go get yourself a manicure the day before the date and/or give yourself a manicure. If this is a casual day date, put on comfy shoes you love so your walk is light and easy. You deserve to both look and feel amazing for your self-date, so give yourself some pre-date pampering. It's amazing how much we'll dress up for our love interests, but not for ourselves. Be good to yourself, and...I'm not kidding...check yourself out in the mirror before you leave and say these words out loud: *"I am beautiful, inside and out, and today/tonight I will love myself and appreciate myself."*

- **Enjoy your date and be present!**

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When you arrive at the restaurant, museum, coffee shop, theater, bookstore, etc., breathe deeply as you walk in. Consciously look around and observe the people you see, the colors of the space, the vibe of the place, the smells of the food. Take it all in and have a five-sensory experience. If going on a self-date makes you anxious, ask yourself these five questions once you arrive to center and ground you:

- » What are three things I see?
- » What are the smells around me?
- » What can I touch? A piece of clothing, the napkin wrapped around your silverware at the table?
- » What are three distinct sounds or noises I can hear?
- » What can I taste or look forward to tasting?

- **Should you meet someone during this date...**

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The beauty of going out alone is that it can open up a world of possibilities in terms of who you might meet. You might find a new bestie in the cute boutique owner, you might befriend the waitress at the café you've been wanting to try for lunch, or, a guy at the bar might see you sitting alone at your dinner table and offer to buy you a drink. Trust your intuition and act accordingly, but no matter what, do NOT leave your solo date. Stick with you. If you meet an interesting guy, great.

Give him your number but do not allow him to take you anywhere. Again safety is #1; please do not get in a car with a man you've never met. You are building a relationship with yourself from a new perspective. Don't ditch yourself! Stay with you and put you first.

When your date is over, give yourself a big hug! You did it!

**EXERCISE**

**Four questions to reflect or journal on:**

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**How did it feel to be with yourself?**

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**What was the most difficult/most challenging part of the experience?**

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**What part of the date made you smile or brought you joy?**

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**What is something you learned about yourself you didn't realize before?**

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I hope you experience some of the same elation you might feel coming home after a great date with a guy you like. Because if you can get comfortable in your own presence, in being your own company and enjoying the experience, I promise you that when it's time for a date with another person, you will be all the more confident in who you are as a woman without needing a man by your side. And that tends to make you a man magnet.

If you did not have a good solo experience, then try to zero in on why that is the case. Was it your surroundings? Your choice of activities? An overall feeling of discomfort when being alone?

Ask yourself: what would have made this experience better for me?

There is some insight to be gained here and a lesson to be learned. While I cannot have a two-way dialogue with you to dive into your responses (I wish I could!) I also know you are bright and smart and intuitive...go within to discern how you can use that discomfort and modify how you show up for yourself. In doing so, you might uncover a huge truth that will take both you and your relationships to the next level.



**Compass Point:** If you discover how to date yourself, you'll get comfortable in your own skin! It can be very fun and enjoyable to treat yourself to a date and really be present in your own solo experience. This enables you to listen to yourself and what you enjoy on a date. This practice empowers your confidence, and you will attract someone who is attracted to that confidence, and who brings confidence of their own into your relationship! Date yourself safely: always let a trusted friend know where you are going and what time to expect you back. Do take a break from your phone and social media...be present in your surroundings and how you are feeling on your solo date. After the date is over, take some time to reflect on your experience, when you felt comfortable and when you experienced discomfort. Get in touch with your feelings and use those as your True North when going on a date with another person!

# RELEASE YOUR EXPECTATIONS



## Make agreements instead

The minute I stopped expecting, I started receiving, and I got more than I could have ever dreamed of. Yet, with all of the goodness flowing my way...I now know I deserve every bit of it! I met my new boyfriend on a dating app. I almost didn't respond to his "like" because he looked like a movie star in his pictures and I figured they were fake! It was a Saturday night, and a date I was supposed to have that night broke our plans last minute, and so I thought...well, what the hell, and liked the movie star back. I had zero expectations that anything would come of it.

To my surprise, I got the sweetest, most intelligent response from him. The messaging just kept going. For hours. And the conversation got better and better. We realized we had shared a childhood experience that put us in the exact same place at

the exact same time when we were kids for an entire year...yet we never really met. We quickly got off the app and switched to texting. And then had a date. Which led to more dates and all kinds of love and happiness.

All while this was going on, I practiced what I am writing in this book. I stayed present. I took each text, each call and each date as it came. That first date when we finished dinner, walked outside into the cold Midwest January night, and he took me into his arms and kissed me under a full moon with such passion was epic. It was one of the best first-date kisses I had ever experienced, which was better than any expectation I could have or should have set. He held me close and quite literally took my breath away, because I had no expectation of how the date would end. It was pure magic.

Let me pause this dating story and explain what I mean about releasing your expectations. Had someone told me to have zero expectations when I was twenty, thirty, or even thirty-nine, I would have been appalled. What do you mean...have no expectations?! But you see, dear reader, I was confusing expectations with *standards*.

I remember sitting in therapy with my first husband, when the therapist looked at me after a difficult conversation and said, "Well, maybe your expectations are too high, Stefani." That comment angered me for years. I stewed over it and thought that he was a terrible therapist who had dismissed my value and my

voice as I explained my views of how my ex-husband had betrayed my trust and my heart. Now I realize, twenty years later, that the therapist was right. I was holding my ex-husband to expectations he couldn't possibly fulfill, because those expectations were placed upon him as our relationship evolved without a clear agreement in place. Were we agreed on things when we were newly dating in college and everything seemed pretty simple? Absolutely. However, a need for an evolving agreement arose as life brought us new situations—first jobs, first house, first baby. Those life circumstances pointed out how very differently we approached the world and we were unable to successfully forge the new agreements required so we could stay on the same page. At the time, I did not realize that agreements and expectations are two very different things.

When we start placing expectations on our new romantic interest—or even one who has been in our lives for a long time—we take away their freedom to show up in the relationship as the unique person they are. We begin putting them into the box of our own creation. We start to assert our will over them, and that gets very dangerous. Why? Because even with the most innocent and best of intentions, our expectations become devices of manipulation.

Here is an example. Imagine that it is Valentine's Day, and you meet up with your man and get nothing...no flowers, no card, no candy. Nada. Turns out he is not the guy who proactively con-

siders how you might feel about Valentine's Day. He is simply not a gift-giver on Cupid's favorite day of the year. If you are a woman who could care less about what you consider to be a fake or cheesy holiday anyway, then you had zero expectations about Valentine's Day and have no issue with the fact that your man didn't give you roses. Your dating life continues on with him in peace.

However, if you are a woman who values what the holiday signifies and had an expectation that your guy would have at least enough of a romantic bone in his body to get you a CVS box of chocolates, then you are understandably crushed when he shows up empty-handed. How this becomes manipulative is a combination of your expectations and your reaction.

If you expected a beautiful bouquet of flowers, you might find yourself subdued during your time with him that day. You might pout. You might withhold affection. Tears might spring to your eyes. You could feel pangs of jealousy because your girlfriends received gifts and you did not. Your date will likely ask you "What's wrong, babe?" or remark that you are being really quiet. Or ask if you are feeling well. If you are able to voice your frustration, you are going to tell him you expected flowers because it is Valentine's Day. If you aren't feeling brave enough to be direct, or angry/sad/hurt, you might tell him that nothing is wrong. Or sweep it under the rug. This creates a potentially manipulative situation, where he either indirectly gets the

message that he royally screwed up Valentine's Day and upset you, or he directly gets the message from you that he failed miserably.

You have every right to be disappointed that you got nothing for Valentine's Day, *but unless you two discussed that it mattered to you to receive a gift on February 14<sup>th</sup> in advance...*and this is where you have to trust me here...you have unfairly placed your expectations upon this man. I know that sounds crazy. It sounds like I am throwing chivalry and human decency out the window, but let's fast-forward this scenario and I hope you will see where I am coming from and how getting rid of expectations will lead you to the right person for you.

So, you had expectations that you would get a gift or flowers, and you didn't get what you wanted. This creates deep disappointment. You will project that disappointment onto your guy. He will feel it directly or subconsciously, and he will have to make a decision on the next romantic occasion as to whether or not he wants to avoid the pain of disappointing you again. And from that place of past and potential pain, he will buy you flowers. While you will momentarily delight in the flowers, you will both remember the last time he didn't get you flowers because your expectations to receive flowers in the first place set up the possibility of disappointment. Consciously or subconsciously, at least one of you will know or feel that the disappointment of the last situation led to his purchase of the flowers this time. And it won't

feel satisfying. You might smile with happiness and hug and kiss him for those flowers. But it will be the pain you expressed in not getting them on Valentine's Day that will subconsciously invade that moment.

Which then causes you to question: Did he get me the flowers this time because he really cares about me, or simply because he didn't want to disappoint me, deal with my silent treatment, my criticism, etc.? The truth is: the guy you are dating wasn't the guy who thought it was important to get you anything for Valentine's Day. The more shocking truth is that: he is not a bad guy. He is simply a guy who doesn't think about treating you to Valentine's Day gifts. This does not make him right or wrong as a person. What it does do is indicate if he is right or wrong for you as a romantic partner.

This is where having zero expectations pays off BIG TIME. If you are woman who wanted a Valentine's gift and he gave you nothing, then you are the lucky beneficiary of your guy presenting himself as he is! Rejoice, because he is showing up as his authentic self! If you are a woman who could care less about a Valentine's gift, this guy could be a great match for you. Neither of you care about a material expression on this particular day. However, if you are a woman who does care about receiving a token of affection on Valentine's Day, now you have the information you need to consider if this is the right match for you! You are not wrong if you are a woman who values that token of af-



fection. That is just how you are built. It is something you value. At the end of the day, perhaps this is something you can let go of because your guy has so many other wonderful traits. You know not to expect a gift on Valentine's Day, and it is an adjustment you are comfortable making. But you have to drop the expectations, and this will enable you to 1) really see who you are dating and 2) have peace about your relationship.

I realize the topic of this chapter likely requires further convincing, so conveniently, I have a Valentine's story of my own to share to bring home this point.

I had only been dating the guy I told you about at the beginning of this chapter for about three weeks before Valentine's Day was upon us. Valentine's Day was on a Sunday, and we had plans to see each other the Wednesday before because I had my kids that upcoming weekend...so no hot Valentine's date for us! In fact, we had not even discussed Valentine's Day. Since we were newly dating and I also was committed to follow my own advice, I had zero expectations. I was just excited to see him and experience another date. I walked into his place that Wednesday evening, and with complete exuberance and a huge grin on his face, he handed me a gorgeous bouquet of pink roses, a box of chocolates and a card...a card!!! He said he knew that because I had my daughters that upcoming weekend, he might not get to see me on Valentine's Day and wanted to be sure I felt special.

In having zero expectations about the holiday and what he would do, I freed us both from any subconscious vibe around expectations. And in doing so, he actually exceeded anything I could have dreamed up for that night. The fact that he thought about my Mom duties and planned in advance to treat me to special gifts was an even bigger and more significant gesture than the beautiful roses and sweet card. And...he showed up as his authentic self. His authentic self clearly likes to give me gifts and surprise me. His authentic self matches with my authentic self—a woman who appreciates not only gifts, but the effort and thought behind them. This moment with him made me feel safe, wanted, and completely in sync with him. It was a transformational lesson for me about having no expectations.

I think of all those years and times I put so many expectations onto each of my two husbands when we were dating. Instead of truly seeing how they were showing up in our relationship, I acted sad or upset or suppressed my honest feelings about a situation because I brought my expectations to the relationships and tried to assert my will to get them to meet those expectations.

Knowing when to set your relationship expectations aside is a tricky topic, because we confuse our choice of words and the meaning of trust in a relationship. In his Jan 6, 2019 article entitled “Trust: Agreement Versus Expectations—What You Should Know,” author Randy Scott aptly differentiates between the two.

He writes: “If I have an expectation on somebody, but it isn’t agreed to by the other person, it is a set up for failure. When I have an agreement, it is a formula for success.”<sup>1</sup> Exactly.

An expectation is one-sided; it is created by you and placed upon your partner, without their consent and very often...without their knowledge. Can you think of a time where you might have done this to a boyfriend, or even a friend or family member? And if they failed to meet your exact expectation, did you feel disappointed, upset or angry? Of course you did—they were not aware of your expectation. It is pure luck if they “get it right.”

However, an *agreement* is a two-way communication where you have discussed and agreed to a certain way of behavior or certain actions within your relationship. Have you ever stopped to consider the difference between an expectation and an agreement? I did not until I was in my forties; my goal is to shave off about two decades of painful discovery for you with this chapter!

Agreements can be physical, emotional or spiritual. For example, an emotional agreement could be this: “[Insert boyfriend’s name here], your support is important to me, and when I’m telling you about my bad day but you don’t ask questions or seem interested, it makes me feel sad and not loved. I would love it if, when I’m telling you about my bad day, you ask me some questions and really engage in supporting me. That will make me feel very loved by you and safe with you. Does that work for you?” Then, you can decide to agree or not agree on this, together. Let me

share how I mistakenly handled this concept in one of my marriages.

My ex-husband did not have many examples of chivalry growing up—his Dad just was not chivalrous with his Mom. Neither seemed to mind or care from my limited view; it appeared to work just fine for them. However, I was raised by a very chivalrous Dad. I grew up watching him open doors for my Mom, letting her go first, order first at a restaurant, etc. The way in which my Dad treated my Mom became a relationship value for me because I grew up appreciating chivalrous behavior between a man and a woman. For my parents, it was a good thing for their relationship. This man I had chosen to marry just didn't know how to be chivalrous and didn't seem to value learning how to be chivalrous either. Time after time, I had the *expectation* that he would open my car door, help me with my coat, introduce me to other people at parties, gesture for me to order first in a restaurant. And time after time, my expectation placed upon him ultimately left me disappointed and frustrated and feeling unloved. Why? Because I placed an expectation *upon him* instead of creating an agreement *with him*.

When we were dating, I liked him so much and I wanted him to like me. I wanted to put him at ease. I didn't want to seem "high-maintenance." And I sure as hell didn't understand the difference between expectations and agreements. So, at the beginning of our relationship, when everything was all chemis-

try and romance and sex, I dismissed my feelings about his lack of chivalry. But eventually, when a new relationship continues on, the day-to-day life starts to kick in. And it started to really bother me that he was not meeting my expectations for chivalry. I started to feel unloved. I began encouraging him to read Gary Chapman's revolutionary and game-changing relationship book *The Five Love Languages* (Northfield Publishing, 2015), He didn't want to read it. I did everything *but establish an agreement with him*.

If I could go back in time, with this newfound knowledge, I would have said to him—*while we were dating and before we got married*—“Hey hot stuff, I really love dating you. You are incredible. I need to share with you that there is something missing in our relationship that I value. I value chivalry. Specifically, it will make me feel safe and loved if you can open doors for me on our dates and let me order first. That might sound silly, but I value that. Would you be willing to open my doors and let me order first when we go out?”

*That* is an agreement conversation. And in having that conversation, I would have seen both through his words and then his actions over the coming weeks and months whether or not he was able and willing to meet me in this agreement. That would have eliminated the expectation of chivalry I placed upon him, one-sided. Instead, I could have seen if he was willing to make an agreement with me. And had I done this, I would have known

if an agreement was possible; if it wasn't, I would have had the information I needed to determine if another conversation was warranted for a second try, or if it was time to decide if he was still the right match for me. There were many reasons I could not stay married to him in the end, but the lack of chivalry ended up being a major issue that contributed to the ending of our relationship. How I wish I would have sought agreement in the beginning rather than placing expectations upon him that he was either unable or unwilling to fulfill.

Here is another common and simple example of an expectation vs. agreement in a new relationship. You have a certain expectation for how frequently your new guy should text you. You think you should wake up to a good morning text from him to start your day, and if you haven't heard from him by noon, your body is physically fired up—and not in a good way. You start stressing out, experiencing anxiety and frustration, and wonder what he is doing (and possibly who else is he with??!).

By the time he finally does text you a “Hey babe, how’s your day going?” in the middle of the afternoon, you are so angry that you:

1. fake a nonchalant/nice response to him and dismiss your feelings
2. explode with a text that communicates you are not happy at all with him

3. ignore it and give him the silent treatment for a few hours because you want to “punish him” for his late text and make him wait the way he made you wait all day to hear from him.

This is a simple but stealthy way in which relationships quickly become dysfunctional and manipulative.

So why not create an agreement instead, and spare yourself pain and suffering? How about this when you first learn of his disappointing (according to your standards for a relationship) texting behavior?

*Jack—I'm great, thanks. I also just realized we might have different texting styles. I love getting a text from you in the AM because then I think about your sexy face all day. (insert fire emoji here) It also makes me feel good to hear from you when I start my day. How would you feel about trying some morning texts?*

See the difference? You can't be mad the first time he makes a “mistake” according to your expectations because remember...expectations are one-sided. They are YOUR version of the way you want the story to go. He has no clue if he's an afternoon texter and you feel sad and stressed all morning that you didn't wake up to a sweet note. The first time you realize one of your expectations has not been met—take a minute to feel it and comprehend what just happened. Then be brave enough

to set an agreement with him. If he is a guy you should keep dating, he's going to hear your request for an agreement and let you know if he can or cannot do it. (Sometimes you won't know right away—does he walk the walk after you talk the talk? This is why you date and try on different relationships for size). Either way, you will begin to see the true picture of who he is, and also get a clearer picture of what you want in a relationship. Then you will know if you should continue on or find someone else more receptive to the relationship agreements you want to make!

By now, you've realized I like to help you put these things into practice, because when we practice, we create muscle memory, and my goal is to help you build these relationship muscles so you can have the most fit and healthy relationships possible.

Time to get out that pen again.

**EXERCISE**

**Think about the last time you set an expectation—a one-sided ideal created only by you—in a romantic relationship. What was that expectation? Write it out below.**

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Now, take that same one-sided expectation and rewrite the script. How could you have converted this into an agreement? Write out your “agreement” conversation below, using the same format I shared with you above in my example about chivalry:

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Can you see why I began the chapter with the advice to release your expectations?

Expectations bring us pain and disappointment, and unfairly also create pain for the recipient of your disappointment. When you begin to recognize the difference between expectations and agreements, you can create the agreements you long for in your romantic relationships.

To create these agreements, start simple with a real-life scenario in a relationship.

## Here are some examples to try out for a first conversation:

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- Your different texting styles...he likes short and to-the-point; you prefer long, flowery texts with lots of emojis.
- Who should pay for drinks or dinner, how often and at what kinds of restaurants or bars.
- Social media activity: when and how frequently you Snapchat or post cute couple selfies on Instagram.
- The amount of time for “just us” to hang out, and/or going out with your friends or his friends,

No matter what, you owe it to yourself to eliminate relationship disappointment from your life! Embrace the creation of agreements, and start to recognize and drop your expectations. You might find yourself exuberantly surprised—as I did with my new boyfriend on Valentine’s Day—because you had no expectations and you find a “right match” for your heart. You might also discover that your courage increases with every agreement conversation you have to strengthen your relationship, or to determine that ultimately, it’s not the right fit. Either way—you win because you are speaking your truth and forging an authentic partnership, one step at a time.



**Compass Point:** Expectations are one-sided and entirely in your own head. Agreements are collaborative and made together with another person. Creating agreements with your boyfriend when you have a mismatch on expectations will keep you authentic in the relationship, and also give your love interest time to demonstrate if the agreements are doable. Remember, your love interest must also be authentically themselves in order for this relationship to be mutually satisfying and fulfilling. It takes courage to create agreements—start with small things that build up your “agreement-making muscle.”



## DON'T ACT CRAZY



### Practice straight talk

*M*y boyfriend, whom I've mentioned earlier in this book, is, simply put, very hot. He is represented by a modeling agency, and when I post pictures of him, the female commentary skyrockets. He has far more to offer the world than just six-pack abs and good looks, as he is a very talented singer, songwriter, and guitarist with a generous heart of gold who is lovingly loyal to me, his family and his friends. Still, I haven't yet met a woman who doesn't enjoy looking at him. The other day, I had to take a deep breath when he told me his brother wanted him to be his wingman at a pool party where I knew there would be many single and attractive women in bikinis. I've had three children...tight abs are not my strong suit. I had a very human reaction to the news of this pool event...a faint pang of fear and perhaps even jealousy of the unknown. A flash of "What if he meets someone he finds more attractive than he finds me?"

But thankfully, I've lived a few decades, been through several relationships and a few marriages, and now I know this; who is meant for you and who is good for you, will stay. Who is not meant for you and who is not ultimately good for you, will leave. In some cases you may actually have to tell him to leave, but the departure will happen if you are living authentically and speaking your truth. This might be one of the most important relationship lessons to learn. If you try to get someone to stay with you through jealousy, coercion, manipulation, or sheer force of will, you actually are disrespecting that person's freedom of choice and messing with your own soul's knowledge of what is best for you.

Caring for or loving someone requires you to put your heart out there, on the line, and that means it could get hurt. I love my boyfriend, so very much. And I trust that he loves me. Yet, I have to respect his free will and his heart. The thought of him meeting someone at a pool party and wanting to continue exploring that person makes my heart hurt. The image of him openly flirting with another woman at one of his gigs kind of makes me want to throw up. But even projecting what may or may not happen is a complete waste of time. And projecting can also be detrimental to a relationship, because that is when we start to act like crazy women and intentionally or unintentionally start accusing our boyfriends of something that hasn't even happened and acting like jealous, immature individuals. And truly, no woman wants to be labeled as the crazy girlfriend! Yet, most of us can look

back on times where we were insanely jealous for situations that were completely out of our control.

This is why if a partner or boyfriend is meant for you and is good for you, he will honor the commitment to you in the most tempting of situations because his heart is fully invested in yours. Same goes for you; we can't put this all on men. While studies show that men still cheat at a higher rate than women, that gap is closing...recent data from a survey by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago says that the gender pattern is changing. The younger the respondents are, the higher the percentage of women who have cheated.<sup>1</sup> So ladies, we have choices to make too. Male or female, when we are in alignment with our heart's desires, we want to stay in that beautiful place. When we are out of alignment, we can either choose to move on from a relationship in an honest, thoughtful way, or we can sabotage the relationship by avoiding the difficult conversations and instead inappropriately flirt, cheat, or have physical or emotional affairs.

As I felt that temporary pang of jealousy regarding my boyfriend's upcoming pool adventure flying as his single brother's wingman, it quickly subsided when I reminded myself that he and I are in total alignment. Our hearts are full of love for each other. I trust he won't violate my trust. And should he meet the love of his life at this pool party, there isn't a damn thing I can do about it, because that means we were only meant to

come together for a short season, and not a lifetime. And that could be a very, very painful reality to deal with, but I only want to be with a man who values and loves me most. I want him to choose me, every minute, every hour and every day. Don't you want that for yourself too? This is where you must remind yourself of all of the work you've done in learning to love yourself and putting yourself first. You deserve only someone who is aligned with you, who gets your heart, and respects what you are building together. If he doesn't, then he isn't ready to be with you. And yes, these realizations can come with pain, but they also save you time and energy and propel you to the next relationship that might be the best and most fulfilling love you've ever had.

Your partner is their own person, their own beating heart, and their own soul. If they cheat, they are not ready to be aligned with your soul. Or, perhaps they cheat and it is a huge learning lesson and you both love each other enough to want to work through it and remain together. In that case, their vibration rises to match yours and there is meaningful and positive growth. Either way, what is meant to be for your goodness will stay; do not force or manipulate someone to stay with you.

This is easier said than done. I was a poster child for people-pleasing and appeasing my first husband...looking the other way when things felt WAY off. I should have let him go early on, because his soul was not ready for a committed marriage. He



loved me, but he just wasn't ready. Instead, I manipulated the situation to get that ring, to try to show him through my love that *of course* he was ready for marriage! (I mean, after all, I lost my out-of-wedlock virginity to him and I knew I had to figure out a way to reconcile that within the framework of my upbringing!) This willpower of mine to be married to him backfired, big time. He simply wasn't ready. I should have let him go, and instead, I held on too tightly, and the result was a heart-breaking first divorce after just five years of marriage.

Coming to these realizations in your mid-40s when you've discovered yourself and built up your confidence and experience is exciting. I get to feel free! I don't have to be jealous about my boyfriend's pool party! I can tell him without reservation or fear that undoubtedly he'll be the hottest guy at the pool and I hope he has fun with his brother. If he falls in love with someone else during a two-hour pool excursion, then I know I am not the woman for him. I know this all with confidence, as much as I also know I'd cry for days and weeks if I lost him, because I love him and I love myself. Just because I have confidence doesn't mean I can't also experience heartbreak.

This confidence can be harder to come by when you are twenty-two and in your first serious relationship and your boyfriend heads to Vegas for a weekend with his buddies and you are 99.9% sure he's going to end up at a strip club and getting a lap dance.

That’s a feeling that can make you sick to your stomach. I know... I’ve been there. But looking back, being sick to my stomach about it was never worth it. This is where true and authentic conversation about what you both want in your relationship is so important.

Have you ever talked about your concerns or fears about your relationship with your boyfriend or the person you are dating? Are you already a master at this, or do you need some practice?

**EXERCISE**

Continuing the self-reflection theme in this book, here are some questions to think about and space to capture your answers:

**What is one of your biggest relationship fears or some of the insecurities you experience within a relationship? (For example—I would be devastated if I found out that my boyfriend is trading provocative DM’s and pictures with another woman on Instagram).**

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How can you take that relationship fear or insecurity, and turn it around to instead focus on loving yourself? (For example, I love myself and know that I deserve transparency and commitment in my relationship. My boyfriend and I have never talked about what we define as cheating on social media ...I'm going to ask him what he thinks cheating is, and I'm going to share with him what I think cheating is so we can make a clear agreement.)

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**How can I empower myself to accept the outcome when I confront my relationship fear? (For example, my boyfriend and I are on the same page about what defines cheating on social media, so now I can relax and lead with trust in knowing that we have an agreement, and if he violates the agreement, then I am empowered to let him go in peace because he disrespected our agreement.)**

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**Compass Point:** Don't let your insecurities fester quietly inside of you; that can result in "crazy girlfriend" behavior. Attempting to control or manipulate a man into loving you or behaving a certain way undermines what your soul needs and what his soul needs in a relationship. Identify your insecurities with courage, name them, speak rationally about them, and have the intent for openness and transparency in your relationship. Ask questions and seek agreement. Then let go and trust. Who and what is meant for you will stay; who and what isn't, will leave...even if that means politely asking them to do so!



## SOME WORDS ON TOXIC PARTNERS

When relationships devolve  
into dysfunction

The most intoxicating relationships are sometimes the most difficult to exit. Even confident women can attract toxic partners. There are many charming men out there who know exactly how to pull you in, enchant you, disarm you, and then take advantage of your good heart and empathetic nature. It is so difficult to see manipulation when you are the one being manipulated; and a toxic partner knows this and will take advantage of it. What starts off as a whirlwind romance can devolve into a dark, uneasy relationship within a few weeks, a few months, or not even until a few years in. My hope for you is that you love big and without fear or reservation, yet always be present and mindful of what you are feeling and experiencing in your relationships. Toxicity can happen gradually; staying present in

your relationship and using open communication rooted in your knowledge of your boundaries and your own values will enable you to know when things start to go sideways.

And just because things get off balance in a relationship doesn't mean you are in a bad or harmful relationship. Every couple stumbles upon unexpected challenges and difficult situations they could never have anticipated. What matters here is how your partner handles those challenges and situations with you. How does he show up for you? How do you argue? Are you able to walk away, cool off, and come back and talk out your issues in ways you both feel heard and respected? Do you and your partner then make lasting changes over time to indicate you've listened and want to respect your partner's wishes for the relationship? Are you able to ease back into your relationship after those uncomfortable moments still feeling like "you" and begin again to laugh, love and enjoy life together? If you are answering yes to those last three questions, it is a positive sign you are in a healthy relationship. Toxicity builds when you begin to answer "no" to those questions...when one or both partners in the relationship berate or batter the other emotionally or physically when situations get stressful or challenging.

We have spent a lot of time in this book discussing the importance of loving yourself first, staying in the present moment, and setting boundaries. The concepts and exercises you have practiced in these pages should help you accomplish two things when



it comes to men who are emotionally or physically abusive. The first, and my greatest hope, is: you won't attract them, period. You will have spent so much time in self-discovery, discerning the power of your own voice and your own boundaries, that your very aura, confidence and self-love will repel those would-be abusers. Those types of men can see from a mile away that your sense of conviction about who you are, what you value, and your authentic voice will prevent their mind games from working on you. Sadly, they may seek out a more vulnerable woman who is still on her journey of discovering her voice and her boundaries—and this goes back to my point in Chapter Two of caring about other women who are on this relationship journey; you can guide them here to get them started, as well as share helpful resources at the end of this book.

The second thing I hope to have helped you accomplish with the advice in this book is that if you do find yourself inside of a toxic relationship and begin to have that churning in your stomach, that uneasy feeling that you cannot express yourself without being met with indifference, chiding, insults, verbal slander, emotional manipulation or threats of physical abuse or actual physical abuse...you remember the concepts you learned in this book and go back to revisit what you say YES to, what your boundaries are, and what you value in a relationship.

Before I continue on in this chapter, if you are in a physically or emotionally abusive relationship, I urge you to please

contact The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or Text “START” to 88788. You can also chat live through their website at hotline.org. Please don’t feel silly or ashamed in reaching out—you are NOT silly and you have nothing to be ashamed about. This organization exists to help women who never thought they would need the help, because no woman ever expects to find herself in an abusive relationship. You are not alone. You are loved. And there are loving women and men out there who want to help you.

Another resource, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), has an excellent website with helpful resources for women in abusive situations. On their website, experts share this insight about the traits abusers have in common<sup>1</sup>:

**There is no one typical, detectable personality of an abuser. However, they do often display common characteristics:**

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- An abuser often denies the existence or minimizes the seriousness of the violence and its effect on the victim and other family members.
- An abuser objectifies the victim and often sees them as their property or sexual objects.
- An abuser has low self-esteem and feels powerless and ineffective in the world. He or she may appear successful, but internally, they feel inadequate.

- An abuser externalizes the causes of their behavior. They blame their violence on circumstances such as stress, their partner’s behavior, a “bad day,” on alcohol, drugs, or other factors.
- An abuser may be pleasant and charming between periods of violence and is often seen as a “nice person” to others outside the relationship.

Keep in mind that physical abuse—as horrific as it is—can be easier to define or identify. You can see the bruises. People are better able to comprehend what they can see. However, emotional abuse can be insidious and torturous and harm a woman greatly. Nobody can see it happening if the abuser keeps it to your one-on-one interactions. That can make those periods of outbursts, verbal berating, or silent treatment even more difficult to understand, explain and comprehend. It can erode your confidence and self-esteem as much as physical abuse.

I can only go so far in this chapter to bring toxic relationships to your attention as I am not a licensed therapist or doctor. My intent in sharing this information with you is to ensure you are aware and paying attention for your own well-being in relationships and also for those of your girlfriends, sisters, mothers, and women in your life you know and love.

If you only scratch the surface and search for phrases on Instagram or TikTok like “mean boyfriend,” “angry boyfriend,” “toxic

relationship,” “emotional abuse”...you will be shocked at the amount of people posting, blogging, and sharing stories of their own abuse discovery and recovery and providing words of help. A man who was once charming can start to test your boundaries and look for ways to assert his control over you or manipulate you to get what he needs out of your relationship. It can happen like a slow drip, and before you know it, you are in the story you never thought you'd create for yourself. I have watched friends of my oldest daughter slowly get pulled into situations that ultimately leave them feeling demeaned, yet they can't quite put their finger on why. Outwardly, he seems nice, but every once in a while serves a non-physical punch with words that hurt, disrespect and demean. Those little moments are the abuser's way of beginning to test your boundaries. What will you tolerate from him? Where will you not stand up to him and or walk away?

Those little moments can quickly turn into bigger moments, and before you even are consciously aware of it, you are suddenly subjected to the emotional whims of your increasingly toxic partner. That's the precious time for true talk and revisiting what you say yes to, what you have established as boundaries, what you value in a boyfriend or partner, and what your own voice is telling you. Your parents may love him and gush about how great he is. Your best friend might think he's the most charming person in the world and oh-so-totally-handsome. You are the only person who can become aware of the slippage into abuse because you are living in that relationship. You must have courage and trust your

instinct! But you don't have to second-guess yourself. You can revisit everything you wrote down in the previous chapters and do a health check on your relationship. Get present and listen to your intuition—it will tell you what you need to do; have courage to take action on it.

Tell someone if you are breaking up with a potentially volatile partner. Ensure your trusted friend knows exactly where you will be when you have the break-up conversation. She can even go with you. Or he, if your trusted friend is a guy—male friends can be the most amazing protectors and support you through anything. Break up in a safe, very public place. And be aware of the tactics an emotional manipulator may use during the break-up. They can make you feel very guilty—like you are ruining their lives. Texts and DM's will escalate...ranging from apologetic to angry. They can point the blame on you and berate you until you give back in and agree to “give it one more shot.” They can show up on your doorstep two weeks later, insisting they've changed and sweetly begging you to take them back.

Abusers, once they have abused you, typically do not change their colors without major therapy work and rehabilitation. As you are a young woman reading this book, most young men who are abusers don't even consciously realize how they are abusing you. Their apologies may, in fact, be very sincere in the moments after the abuse. Keep in mind that we are shaped by our families, our upbringing, and how we were cared for as babies. There are

men out there in the heat of the moment who abuse and manipulate because this is how they got attention or coped as children. And then when they are done abusing, they “wake up” and do realize what they have done is wrong. However, this doesn’t mean they are prepared to fix it or have the resources to fix their behavior. It may take them decades to finally find themselves in therapy and get help...or they may never get help and go from one relationship to the next, continuing the abuse.

The point is, you are young. You are vibrant. You are loved. You have an ENTIRE FUTURE ahead of you. And there are so many good-hearted, loving men out there. Do not settle for any person who finds a way to make you feel less than the incredible woman you are. If a man begins to jab at you, disrespect you, take actions that directly conflict with your values, makes you feel uneasy or puts that pit in your stomach while you find yourself watching every word you say extremely carefully....my sweet new friend, get out of there. Please. Get help, talk to a trusted friend or family member, journal about what you learned, and take some time to heal. Then, go back through the exercise of writing out what you say yes to, establishing your “no” boundaries, writing out your list of what you want in a partner, and listening to your inner voice. Do the work, please. There is no need to stay in a toxic relationship.



**Compass Point:** There are so many resources to help you safely exit an abusive relationship, and while I am not an expert, I do write this advice from the heart because I want you to be safe, healthy, and happy. See more resources at the end of this book. Remember—love yourself first because you are made from love and you are worthy of love!





## WHEN YOU STOP LOOKING...!!!



As a single woman, it can be difficult to stop thinking about your singleness. Your girlfriends who are in relationships are a visible reminder that you are not in one. You find yourself constantly swiping on dating apps. You get invited to a party, a concert, a wedding...and are without a plus one. The next chapter will address the joys of being single because there is an incredible freedom you can find in embracing your single-ness instead of fighting it, but in this chapter, I want to explore with you the concept of setting an intention, releasing it, and allowing new love to flow into your life.

Have you ever heard the expression, “You’re gripping the bat too tightly.” Or, “Don’t grip the bat too tightly.” It is an expression rooted in baseball, about how a player should hold the bat with intent but loosely enough to ensure the most effective contact with the ball. Gripping the bat too tightly often results in missed

contact with the ball or holds back the ball from going as far as it could go. I like this excerpt from the article “Baseball Bat Grip and Angle” at [www.probaseballinsider.com](http://www.probaseballinsider.com):

*Keep it [your grip] as light as possible in your fingers. As the swing progresses your grip will automatically tighten up until contact where the bat grip is the strongest. This all happens automatically.\* Your upper body will usually be as relaxed as your grip, and remember that the more relaxed you are before an explosive movement, the more explosive it will be<sup>1</sup>.*

*\*Underlined emphasis added by this author.*

Notice how the article states that “this all happens automatically.” Wow...that really struck me, pun intended. That is because the muscle already instinctively knows what it needs to do and there are natural laws of physics at play here designed to get that ball into home run territory. Can you also not believe that there is a natural law when it comes to your soul finding love?

What every baseball player ultimately desires is a home run. We can also apply this analogy to helping you hit a home run in your love life. Are you “gripping the bat” too tightly when it comes to finding love?

When you grip anything too tightly, you choke the natural flow of things. If you pinch a garden hose, the water cannot flow from the source to the end of the hose to water the garden. The same is true in love. If you are single and grip too tightly the idea of

finding love, love will likely not find you. You are too focused on the how of it happening, and you are dampening the vibration that will attract love into your life without you even realizing it. If you relax your grip, set your intention, and trust the universe's timing...love can then flow to you as easily as the water does from an unrestricted garden hose.

You might have heard someone say, "The minute I stopped looking, he walked into my life!" It is true that this can and will happen for you, but you have to authentically relax back into the idea. You cannot fool your soul or the vibration you are sending out into the universe. If you secretly are still gripping the bat too tight on finding love, even though you proclaim publicly that you've "stopped looking," love will not flow to you in the way you desire because you are subconsciously projecting anxious or worried vibes and the subconscious of another individual will register these anxious or worried vibes coming from you. You will repel them away from a possible love relationship with you. Or even worse, you will attract the wrong person who is also in a low-vibe or anxious state of being.

So, what is a girl to do? It is *hard* to release your constant thoughts of wanting to find romantic love, right?

Actually, finding love might not be as difficult as you think *and* you will have more energy and time to pursue your goals, dreams, hobbies, interests, and friendships because you won't be constantly sucking yourself down into the whirling, low-vibe

vortex of mindlessly or even desperately trying to find the love of your life.

Here is my Love Attraction process: **Set—Release—Allow**

How does this process work? First, I will share a personal story about when I decided to stop gripping the bat so tightly and utilize the Set-Release-Allow formula, because even though I am a few decades older than you, the same rules of attracting love into your life apply whether you are forty-two or twenty-two.

After some socially distanced dating experiences on outdoor patios in the summer and fall of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and having invested way too many hours in dating app chats that went nowhere, I realized I was gripping my “I want to find a boyfriend” bat way too tightly. Over the couple of years leading up to 2020, I had already been doing research on the meaning and purpose of love, soulmates, twin flames, why we attract people into our lives, dysfunction in relationships and marriage, establishing relationship boundaries and learning to love oneself first. I *knew* better than to spend hours late into the night swiping on dating profiles, yearning for a prospective boyfriend’s picture to pop up and be my perfect next match. I gave myself a pep talk—employing many of the mindfulness techniques and self-care best practices described in this book—and deleted all of my dating app subscriptions at the start of 2021.

## Set

I decided to create a Vision Board, which I made digitally on Canva, but which you can certainly do the more tactile way by using printed pictures that inspire what you envision for your life. My vision board had about a dozen pictures depicting what I wanted to manifest in my life. In addition to the Vision Board, I also used the very same exercises I outline for you in Chapters 4 and 5 of this book to set my dating boundaries and standards. I wrote those out in my brown leather journal one cold morning with a cup of hot coffee nearby and the Christmas tree still beautifully keeping its early January vigil over my cozy living room. I also recommitted to getting and staying present...allowing one minute, one hour and one day to unfold without anxiety over the past and the future. It was a peaceful, quiet morning for this work, and I happily committed the time to investing in myself.

On my Vision Board, amongst many other graphics and pictures representing what I wanted to manifest in 2021, sat a generic stock photo of a model-attractive, incredibly in-shape handsome man with full head of gorgeous hair and a well-groomed beard (totally into beards starting in 2020!) Truly though, the reason I selected this particular photo was the warm smile and confidence this man exuded—charisma, kind eyes, a beautiful smile, and white teeth that would light up the darkest room!

In my journal, I wrote down the values and qualities of the man and love I wanted to manifest. This exercise was the first step in

my three-part Love Attraction Formula: **Set**. By envisioning what I found both physically and emotionally attractive in a romantic partner, and literally putting it to paper, I **set** my conscious and subconscious to begin attracting this love. I decided to “go big” and not minimize the level of both physical and emotional attractiveness of my future man. I read my lists several times to make sure they reflected my heart’s desires and also the very real human experience I wanted to have in relationship with another human. I knew the kind eyes I was visualizing held deep intelligence and a quest for spiritual growth. I knew his fit stature would be one that could hold me and keep me warm and safe. I looked at my vision board several times a day to really experience it. Feeling that you have accurately reflected your deepest desires in your written words and any visuals you choose to use—such as a Vision Board—is key.

### **Release**

**Release!** I literally threw out my arms big—like I was hugging the world—and verbally declared to the Christmas tree in the corner and the rest of my living space, up through the roof, and into the blue sky and beyond that a man with these qualities and characteristics would be attracted into my life and I no longer needed to stress or experience anxiety about finding this “dream man.” I had set my intention, and in releasing it into the universe, I experienced confidence and calmness that the universe would take care of finding him for me. I would be given all I needed—as would the person I had yet to meet in the other half

of this romantic formula—to enable this person to flow into my life. I did not know if this meant days, weeks or months, but I could feel in the exuberant release of these intentions that everything would work out for me. Key in the **Release** step is that you TRULY release your intentions and trust. If you believe in God or a higher power, or simply want to say a mantra that will bring you peace, here is a “releasing” prayer I wrote for myself that I invite you to use as well:

*God, Spirit [or the name by which you call your higher power]  
I give over to you my soul's desires for a romantic relationship.  
I have thoughtfully envisioned the qualities and characteristics  
that I seek in a partner, and I have respected my authentic self  
and her wants and needs in the process. I now release all anxiety,  
worry, and doubt to you, and move forward in confidence that in  
the universe's perfect timing, all is well and my love is on the way.*

And ladies, you must truly commit to the belief that ALL IS WELL and release any anxiety you carry. Say this prayer or create your own meditation or mantra along similar lines any time you begin to feel worry or fall into the trap of obsessing about finding the right partner. The key to the success of this method is that you must *feel* the words with all of your being!

In January 2021, I created this prayer and I felt it with every bone in my body. I was tired of wondering if I'd be too old to find the man I desired, or that I'd never find someone who would accept

the fact I had been divorced twice, or if I'd fall for someone who would bring significant relationship baggage of his own that I might not be able to accept. I was tired of the dating apps. I didn't want to spend another hour swiping, messaging, texting. The whole dating process was exhausting me.

I committed fully to this process because I simply didn't want to carry the burden of thinking about it anymore. I wanted to enjoy my life, my beautiful daughters, my career, my girlfriends...and not waste another minute of time searching through a sea of unknown male faces.

### Allow

**Allowing** takes us back to the analogies of the grip on the bat or the flow of water through the garden hose. Allowing also means trusting. Allowing means not gripping the bat too tight, but trusting the laws of motion to make the right contact and bring you the kind of love that makes you feel like you've hit a home run. And listening to that small, quiet voice—many of you might call it your “gut” or your intuition—which is God or the universe guiding you to the right next step that allows everything you wrote down and put on your vision board to flow.

I decided to allow. What happened next surprised even me, because the story did not unfold as I thought it would. I had met a guy on a dating app in the fall of 2020 who appeared handsome, smart and successful. He was an attorney who really was fun to text and with



whom it was apparent that we had an intellectual attraction and chemistry. Out of the blue in late January, he texted me. He had saved my number and wanted to reconnect. Nothing negative had happened between us that previous fall. Our communications just kind of fizzled, and I did know that I would not chase a man ever again in my life, so I let it fizzle, thinking it wasn't meant to be. He asked if he could call me, we had an amazing conversation, and he asked me on a late January Saturday night date.

Three hours before our date, he texted to cancel, citing food poisoning. I immediately had a gut feeling it had nothing to do with food, but a different dating option had popped up for him and he decided to go for her instead. I was so disappointed. I tried to brush it off, but I was alone that Saturday night and felt a little down.

I had deleted my dating apps; however, I was still connected on Facebook dating. Facebook dating can be pretty dismal when you live in the state of Missouri (sorry, Missouri...just a lot of single men with beer guts and pictures of dead deer and catfish) but it was a cold Saturday night, I had a glass of wine in hand, and I justified opening it up by saying that I wouldn't proactively look for anyone...I just was curious to see who liked me. It's okay to be human, ladies...and looking back, I know now it was also my intuition telling me to look!

As I swiped past a few dozen pictures of men fishing, men with missing teeth, and men in groups holding cans of Bud Light flipping the camera off with their buddies, a picture stood out to me.

An incredibly handsome man (with a beard!) who quite candidly...looked way too good to be real. I thought the guy was using a male model's pictures, because you could see they were taken by a professional photographer and I had *never* encountered a man in my home state who had this kind of look or vibe.

But he had typed me a "hello," so I decided to say hello back. An hour of messaging later, we learned we had been in the same selective choir together as children and we had literally toured around the Midwest together when we were young kids. What??!! We didn't even remember each other or our names! But we had the photographic evidence of a choir picture together that proved it. It was an unbelievable coincidence, especially because he had moved to Chicago and then Los Angeles for a music career and had been living away from St. Louis for twenty-five years. It was the pandemic that brought him back to his hometown, and he had only been back in St. Louis for two months when we began this Facebook chat.

A first date came later that week, and it was magic. Three hours in the restaurant together seemed like ten minutes. At the time of this writing, we are in love and going strong with eighteen blissful months together. Everything I had written down and put on my vision board actually manifested with the appearance of him. I'm amazed and delighted daily by his kindness, huge heart, empathy, chivalry, talent and of course...handsome face, fabulous beard and a smile that lights up every room he enters. I regularly send up a "thank you" to the universe and bless the attorney

that broke our date that Saturday night. I could not have possibly controlled those events that led me to my incredible boyfriend, whom I had rehearsed with in the same choir room and toured on the same tour bus with all of those years ago. I believe the universe brought us together because I invested in myself first and did the hard work of examining my past relationships and learning to love me. He had been doing that same work for a few years too, as he had attracted some toxic partners and was focusing on loving himself as he moved back to St. Louis. We were brought together at exactly the right time, and the relationship continues to exceed even my most hopeful manifestation dreams. I have received even MORE than I intended, but it only came because I did the work.

Have you had an experience like this of attracting love once you stopped gripping the bat too tightly? If so, you already may know how releasing feelings of anxiety about finding a boyfriend can bring both relief and raise your vibe to attract the right person when both of you are ready. If not, you might find yourself still desperately swiping and wasting hours, constantly eyeing the room when you are in class or at work, or surveying the bar while only half-listening to your girlfriends talk while you scope the room for a possible mate. All of this non-present, living in the future, stifling energy will repel what you want instead of attract it. Let's put to work the Set-Release-Allow method now and change your trajectory!

**EXERCISE**

**Step 1: Set Your Intention**

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You already have some of this done as you wrote out your expectations and boundaries for your desired relationship at the beginning of this book. Now, it's time to create and manifest specifically the love you are seeking. Here are questions to answer to set your intention:

My ideal mate is ....., ....., and .....  
He makes me feel ....., ....., and .....  
Physical qualities he has are ....., ....., and .....  
..... Together, we will ....., ....., and .....  
.....

**Step 2: Release**

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You can take the prayer/meditation example I provide in this chapter to release your intention to the universe. Or, write out your own in the space below. Be sure it conveys confidence and expresses gratitude!

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### **Step 3: Allow**

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Now, it is time to let the universe do its thing! Be patient yet be aware. Live presently and savor each moment as it comes, knowing with gratitude and confidence that spirit/God/universal love is working in your favor! Relax into this knowledge. When you find yourself in moments of frustration or even despair, repeat your Release prayer or meditation.

It also helps to focus on YOU during this time of allowing! Return to the knowledge you gained in Chapter 3 about self-love and in Chapter 10 about dating yourself! Use this time of allowing to just “be.” If you find that in “being,” you are called to explore a class, a hobby, deepen a friendship, take time for a family member....do that! Your soul and intuition will guide you along the way if you stay present, and this enables the period of allowing and attraction to occur.

Here are some quotes to help inspire your period of allowing:

*Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.*

-RUMI

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*Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

(MATTHEW 6:26-34)

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*You only lose what you cling to.*

-BUDDHA

*Instead of forcing yourself to feel positive, allow yourself to be present in the now.*

-DANIEL MANGENA

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*Allow what is to be.*

-JOSEPH RAIN

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*Releasing resistance to allow miracles to manifest is not about sitting back and doing nothing. It is about stepping back, and doing something.*

-ANTHON ST. MAARTEN

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*Life works in a very simple way. Resist it less and allow it to unfold the way it wants. Use your power of allowing.*

-RAPHAEL ZERNOFF



**Compass Point:** Gripping the bat too tight—overthinking when and how your love interest is going to show up, where your next date is coming from, and ignoring the present to obsess over dating—will mess up your vibration and potential to attract the right person. Instead, set your intention for your future love, release that intention to the universe with confidence and peace, and allow love to flow your way!





# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP GOALS & INTENTIONS



A super short chapter I couldn't  
leave out!

*“When you’re connected to the power of intention, everywhere you go, and everyone you meet, is affected by you and the energy you radiate. As you become the power of intention, you’ll see your dreams being fulfilled almost magically, and you’ll see yourself creating huge ripples in the energy fields of others by your presence and nothing more.”<sup>1</sup>*

-DR. WAYNE W. DYER,  
*The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-create  
Your World Your Way*

*M*y intimate relationship experiences—nearly thirty years in the making—have taught me that goal-setting and setting intentions are two very different things.

From writer Coralie Sawruck, a goal is “**An aim or desired result.**” Simply put: [a goal is] what you concretely achieve. An Intention is “Something that you want and plan to do.”<sup>2</sup> In essence: the process you go through until you get to “what you concretely achieve.” Note that an intention is the process you go through. That is an important distinction from a goal-oriented end result.

I was a goal-oriented dater. My goal was to find a long-term, lasting love. A partner. A husband. I was focused on the outcome—the “end result.” I wanted those picture-perfect Instagram vacations that couples take to exotic places. I wanted a nice house, decorated perfectly. I wanted an outdoor wedding with a gorgeous arbor full of flowers and my perfect cream-colored lace dress. I wanted two, no three children, because as I rounded into the early 2000s, a family of five became the new family of four. I achieved these goals but broke my heart in the process. You might find yourself also dating with an end-goal in mind...maybe even without realizing consciously that this is what you are doing.

I have loved setting goals my entire life. The practice of setting goals has helped me achieve some pretty incredible milestones and experiences in my life—such as writing this book, publishing this book and reaching millions of young women. (Okay, the first two I’ve achieved, we’ll see how that third one turns out!)

Goals are great for defining, envisioning and accomplishing those things that are important to you in your journey. I adore

goals. They are extremely helpful for school, career, and achieving certain milestones in your life. The problem is that goal-setting doesn't work when you are dating because there are two, complex individuals involved, and as we've discussed in previous chapters, the only person you can control in this dating world is YOU. When you are goal-oriented in dating, you are focusing on the end result and not the journey. And it's that journey...that process of discovery...where you may miss the yield, exit, and stop signs that are intended to attune you to your intuition and guide you on the road to love. That is why I recommend focusing on your intentions, rather than dating goals. Set your intentions upon what is good and best for your heart, and everything will flow from there!

So, what is your true North? What should you intend? To what direction is your Love Compass set? Only you can answer those questions, because only you can know what fulfills you and what lights you up. The North on your compass is unique to you. Perhaps it is one of safety and contentment. Maybe it points to adventure and fun. Hopefully after reading this book and giving thought to the exercises, you can see your compass shining and set a course that takes you where you want to go, both on your journey of self-love and on the path of deeply fulfilling, fun, and joyful relationship love.



PARTING WORDS &

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## FINAL THOUGHTS



*T*hank you for investing your dollars into this book, for taking the time to read it, and for allowing me to be vulnerable with you. I hope this book serves you as I have intended all along when I began writing the very first chapter—that you discover who you are, love yourself, live presently, and enjoy living and loving! You can do this work! The right relationship is waiting for you around the corner, but the universe needs you to find your happy place first where you are in love with yourself. Only there, in that place, your true North, will you meet the one who can love you in ways you’ve only dreamed...and more!

My contact information is below, and I’d love to hear from you. Please share your stories and ask questions. I will always strive to answer as many of your notes as I can. If you have a friend whom you feel could benefit from my hard-won stories and ideas, then please...encourage her to get the book too and to do the exercises! Let’s all lift each other up. There is abundant love for

EVERYONE. There is no shortage of love. Love multiplies. Love yourself and love others. Love is eternal and it comes to us in different forms. Be open to receiving love, and start by loving YOU.

With gratitude,  
Stefani

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*TikTok:* stefaniseeklove

# HELPFUL RESOURCES



To further your self-love and  
relationship journey

## Books

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*Available in print and on Audible... if it's tough to find time to sit down and read, these are great to listen to while doing laundry, getting your make-up on for the day, walking to class, at the gym, etc.*

*Boundary Boss* by Terri Cole

*Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent & Lead* by Brené Brown, PhD

*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent & Lead* by Brené Brown PhD

*The Way of Integrity* by Martha Beck

*The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle

*Untamed* by Glennon Doyle

*Magic Words* by Lindsey Ellison

*The Power of Intention* by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

*Out of the Fog* by Diana Morningstar

*Too Good to Leave Too Bad to Stay* by Mira Kirshenbaum

*Feeding the Soul (Because It's My Business)* by Tabitha Brown

*Inner Child Healing: A Guide to Inner Awareness Through  
Reparenting the Lost Inner Child* by Damian Blair

## **Podcasts**

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*The Mindvalley Podcast* with Vishen (so many different and enlightening episodes on all kinds of topics, including relationships)

*Relationship Advice*, hosted by Chase & Sarah Kosterlitz (important relationship topics through all stages)

*ManTalks*, with Connor Beaton (want to better understand how men think and also explore your own ideas about what it is like to be a man or a woman? This is GOLD)

*Love Live* with Matthew Hussey (fun, light-hearted and excellent relationship advice)

*Super Soul* with Oprah (I mean...it's Oprah!!)



*The Terri Cole Show*, hosted by Terri Cole (*the boss of boundary-setting in relationships*)

*So, We Met Online* with Erika and Chris (*no new episodes now, but it's a fun series with good dating stories*)

*The Holy F\*ck Podcast* with Krista Kim and Katherine McClelland (*no new episodes now, but these two women became my virtual best friends—unbeknownst to them—through my most difficult of days*)

**Websites & Organizations for support if you know or suspect you might be in an abusive relationship:**

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National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: [www.NCADV.org](http://www.NCADV.org)

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233 or text START to 88788 [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

“*How to Recognize the Signs of Emotional Abuse*” by Ann Pietrangelo and Crystal Raypole found on [www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com)

“*Five Signs of Emotional Abuse*” by Jennifer Koza on [www.safehorizon.org](http://www.safehorizon.org)



## APPRECIATION...

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Mom and Dad (Melita & Bob), thank you for bringing me into this world and for encouraging and nourishing my dreams each and every day. Thank you for praying for my health and happiness since the day I was born. Thank you for your sacrifices. You were there to cheer me on and to catch me with loving support when my relationships began and ended. You have helped me with my leaky basements, home remodels, kidney stones and flus, and overnights for your granddaughters. You gave me a foundation of faith and launched my spiritual journey that grows deeper each day. I love you both dearly.

Sophia, you are the young woman and daughter sent from Heaven to be my earthly rock; you soothe and inspire me every day with your calm and loving energy, your wise soul, your beautiful smile and your never-ending patience. Thank you for being my soulmate, my voice of reason, and my heart. *You are my sunshine.*

Lyla, your bright-eyed intelligence, your creative mind and sweet heart have helped me to see the world in new, different and better ways. Thank you for teaching me to be a more thoughtful and curious Mom and for your deep, heartfelt love. Our conversations, big and small, mean everything to me. I love and appreciate you with my whole heart. *Though she be but little, she is fierce.*

Camilla, your charisma and energy fills me with laughter, hope and love. Thank you for finding your authentic voice at such a young age and reminding me to find mine. Our souls have been together for thousands of years and I'm grateful for the light you infuse into my world; life is yours to create however you want to write your story. *I love you to the moon and back.*

Joe, we have loved both before and will again after this lifetime, and I'm grateful we finally met in this life when the timing was right. I will sing with you for eons. Thank you for your constant encouragement, belief in me, reminders to believe in myself, and for being the spiritual partner and lover I've desired since I can remember having the hope of true love's existence. Our life together is fun, passionate, meaningful and vibrant. I love you.

Lori, my only sister, my funniest childhood companion and now one of my dearest friends...thank you for putting up with my big sister bossy ways and for cheering me on for decades. You are beautiful and smart; you deserve all the love. I'm grateful for yours.

Shannon, my brilliant cousin who can write circles around me, I admire you more than you know and will always be there for you.

To the Sieck and Becker families...I am grateful for my heritage, for beautiful childhood memories and for the foundation of our families. I appreciate and love you all.

Jeanine, for inspiring Chapter 3, for decades of friendship and support, and for reminding me that loving yourself is the most selfless thing you can do...thank you!

Brenda, my most unexpected yet happiest friendship reunion. Thank you for telling me how you saw me as we grew up together, and for believing in me when we found each other again as grown-ups. Your support has been incredible...from straight talk to book cover design to creative support to wine and cheese nights...I love you and I'm grateful for you.

To my tribe of girlfriends who have each selflessly given me the most incredible love and support through all of my relationships, tears, smiles and important life and career moments, I love you all: Mindy S., Kristie A., Claire S., Amy D., Carolyn S., Stephanie G., Brynne R., Dounia G., Sally H., Anne-Michelle A., Claudia M., Angie R., Cindy B., Danielle A. (& Bobby!), Heather E., Kristin B., Holly P., Teresa K., Marti M., Pam W., Audra S., Jerianne B., Stefanie C., Ginger A., Shirley J.

Holly R., your ear, your intuition, your guidance and your support brought me through some dark times into a new and better vision for myself and for my life. Thank you for teaching me to give myself grace!

Michael, who makes my hair look lovely and on-trend while listening to all of my love, heartbreak and triumph stories and

encourages me through my entrepreneurial dreams...you are the best. Thank you for your good heart.

Anna, my “fourth” daughter, may this book inspire you to go after the love of your dreams...I am grateful for your devotion to Sophia and I love you! (and your mama!)

Caitlyn, you are beautiful and smart and deserve only the very best love. I believe in you. Thank you for loving Sophia so dearly!

Lauren and Katie, you are two special girls and amazing new friends to Sophia, and I know life has great things in store for each of you. Thank you for encouraging me to continue on with getting this book out into the world!

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