

The Dating Game

A Message to the Parents of Singles

Why should parents take advice from their own children? Doesn't being older, wiser and more experienced count for something?

How can anyone else know what's best for another person's child? Who knows better than a parent?

No one dare argue the truth of such a statement, but for some singles the absolute last person they want to discuss their single life with is Mom or Dad—which is sort of foolish if you think about it. Parents are definitely out for their child's best interest. No one can be better cheerleaders than they are, and who knows what a child needs and wants more than they do? Unfortunately, there is one thing wrong with this picture: when emotions are involved, it warps everyone's common sense and that is why sometimes a single feels that he/she needs to speak to someone who cares, but is just a little bit more removed.

We often refer to the two extremes. When parents seek advice on how to deal with a single child at home, who in their opinion, should be married already. Parent 'A' is constantly telling her daughter to lose weight, dress to impress, go to every party there is and get out there and get married already, because "your sister is getting older and we can't have two unmarried girls in one house." She may be saying to her son, "How come your friend got that girl? Maybe if you flirted with her more you could have had her for yourself. What's the matter with you? You are way too picky!"

You can imagine how their children must feel: pressured, unwanted, and expected to settle and live out a parent's dream so as not to disappoint.



Then there is the story of Parent 'B.' Mom sees her daughter home on a Saturday night, and walks up to her and gives her a giant hug. "You know honey, I thank G-d you are still living in the house because I get to spend so much extra time getting to know you, my beautiful wonderful daughter." Or (to her son), "I am so confident that one day a very lucky woman will be blessed to have found you, but until then I'm going to enjoy every moment I can with you." Is this too exaggerated for you? Perhaps, but as you read this you all know in your hearts that this happens to some extent or another. And although this happens predominately with females, being male is no easier. Some men feel just as much pressure from their parents as the girls do, albeit in different ways.

Parents, the choice is yours—Parent A or Parent B? We're not taking away from what some parents may feel inside, but some things are better left unsaid. Maybe some of the following advice will help you decide.

Last month we called out to everyone to send in their dating advice to the opposite sex, as well as to their parents, and we received some very interesting responses.

Here are some of the comments and advice we received from other parents—those with experience, and the singles themselves.

On Encouragement and Being There

- My parents always encouraged me to live life to the fullest. They always pushed education and bettering myself in various ways, through my job, hobbies, etc. I think the key is for parents not to send a message that single life is the time when you wait around to get married. My single years are precious time that I will look back on one day and feel happy that I used them wisely.

- Don't ask us, every time we come home from a party, how it was. There is enough social pressure out

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there. There's no need to add parental pressure too—and if we want to skip a party, let us!

- Parents should encourage kids (not nag them) to keep them in the loop about dates and people in their life.

- Some of us want our parents to act more as a friend and not as a parent all the time!

- I'd rather my parents not be involved in my dating life, just because it should be my own choice who I want to date and not my parents.

- Parents should not be more

to do with our time, and not the things that we have no control over, like our marital status.

- When parents make suggestions of whom to date, we act like we don't listen, but we push it to the back of our minds and actually do take their advice sometimes, even though we'll never admit it.

- I am so glad you are doing this article because I finally have the chance to say what I feel. I'm sure many others feel like I do and I hope that all our parents are reading this. Why do you put so much pressure on us? Don't you think we know this

to live with the person we choose—we have to wake up next to this person!

- We girls spend a lot of time with our moms, and let's face it, women are more open and talk more about these things. But moms, please, take it from the girls your sons are dating—you must teach your sons the social graces. Teach them what to do on a date, how to treat a girl, what to say. Teach them before they start dating, because they probably won't tell you when they do. Teach them all the rules of chivalry—trust

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particular than kids are! Be careful what you say to your kids about the people they date, or might potentially date.

- Parents, you need to trust us more! You brought us up to think for ourselves—now let us!

- It bothers me so much that this community judges people based on their marital status. If you are single, you are considered incomplete, desperate—not everything you can be yet. I could have eight degrees and the highest paying job, but if I'm not married, people look at me and say *hazita* (poor thing). Maybe if people change their attitudes and celebrate each individual for who they are and what they have accomplished on their own merit, the community would be a less pressure-filled, tense environment for all. Judge us on the things we have control over, like our morals and what we choose

on our own without constantly hearing it from you and feeling we've disappointed you? We're trying and doing the best that we can! You are here to make us feel better about things, not worse! I hope you are all reading this and listening. We know you love us, but being a parent is more than just love.

- To all of our parents: please stop telling us to go out with people you would like for us. We are different than you are. We have our own taste and likes. To tell us to go after money or family instead of looking for someone who compliments our personalities just confuses us.

Be a role model and show and tell us what is important. Few people get exactly what they ask for and want, but they often find happiness in ways they never expected. All we want is love and happiness. And remember, none of you have

me—many boys know nothing about it. And if you don't have that relationship, talk to your husbands and tell them to guide them. Please, we girls need all the help we can get from you!

- Parents must teach their sons and daughters the difference between men and women because many are in shell shock when they date. I don't mean the biological differences but more "the men are from Mars and women are from Venus" differences. Men need to know how sensitive women are. They need to know that a woman can cry for days over something that is meaningless to a man. Women need to know what being *shatra* (outstanding homemaker) is all about and that they shouldn't nag a guy to death when he walks in the house. Teach them *shalom bayit*.

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On Lifestyle

- Parents should try not to bring up high-maintenance children. Many of you do this to lure the opposite sex, but in many cases it backfires and scares them away. When we boys see your daughters wearing Gucci and Prada, we are wondering how we will be able to afford them in the future if this is what they are accustomed to now. Aren't you proud of who your child is inside? If so, show them there is nothing to prove on the outside.

- It's okay to tell your child (boy or girl) that you can help them financially when they get married (if you

would act a lot differently. I hope "those kind of parents" read this article because it's not fair to their kids and someone has to tell them.

- The different levels of religious observance in this community has made dating even more difficult than it has ever been. Do you eat out or not? Would you date a girl in skirts? A boy who learns? What if you are less observant? Some parents' religious levels are so far away from their children and it makes it even more confusing! It's unfortunate that people look at the parents and judge their child's religious levels. People must keep in mind that our parents'

and turning off the TV, all encourage more family time and communication. There are way too many distractions nowadays. If you want your kids to tell you more about their lives, don't wait for the 10 minutes a day that you see them to bombard them. If you make your home a comfortable haven, as you hang out and talk about other things, more opportunities will arise to discuss what is happening in their lives.

- The experts tell us that the kind of couple our parents are, directly affects who we choose in a mate. If you are brought up with parents in a good marriage, then you

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can). You can take that added pressure off of them.

- If you want to see what your children will be in the future, look in the mirror. Examine your own lives and see where your priorities lie and realize your children see everything. Parents, take responsibility for your kids!

- Make them struggle a bit! Let them see Mommy can deal without a maid for a day. Let Dad show the family how he budgets everything. Don't just talk about it—do it!

- When I look for a person to date, I also look at their parents. It tells a lot about where they came from and where they are going. If parents act 'inappropriately,' it doesn't reflect well on their child. If people in the community realize that their actions directly affect their children, I think many more of them

generation was very different and in some cases less observant. Give the single the benefit of the doubt that he has chosen to grow even if his parents have not. Instead of punishing her, give her credit and applaud her for taking such an independent leap. And stop scrutinizing the level of religion in so much detail. Many people grow with their spouses, so concentrate on the qualities you can't change, not the ones you can. There should be more tolerance for others' standards and dates should not be ruled out because of more or less observance. It is much better to focus on our similarities than our differences.

- The atmosphere that parents keep in their house is very important. Family dinners, hanging up the phone when someone enters a room, shutting down the computer

look at marriage as a positive thing. If you were brought up by parents in a bad marriage, it can do one of two things. It can make you not trust as much as you should, or cause you to do the exact opposite and come out better and stronger than your parents did. Parents should keep this in mind and realize that kids see everything.

Match Tips:

- If a relative, friend or matchmaker makes a suggestion—do your homework. As much as a person researches the person she is setting your child up with, every family and every rabbi has different standards. It is not the matchmaker's responsibility—you are obligated to ask questions. If need be, ask the person making the suggestion to

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provide you with references.

- Yesterday's 'unfamiliar' name is today's most popular name. Think out of the box and look for the good in people and not just a name. The community is growing and changing tremendously. Be a leader not a follower. Do what's best for your child.

- If you have a suggestion of a match for your child, let someone else suggest it to them. Some kids resent a parent telling them.

- (Tip from The Link) The role of an agent is not to replace a parent. We always encourage the singles to communicate with their parents but if they choose not to, at least the parents can feel comfortable their

parent they must tell the agent directly and only then can the agent speak. Parents should not call agents or stop them in the street asking for information, as it will not be given. We hope and pray that singles are open and share their lives with their parents. The agents should only be used as an aide.

- Many people don't realize this, but if someone matches a couple, be it a friend, relative, matchmaker or agent, it is customary to send them a small token of appreciation. There is actually a connotation in the Gemara that refers to this. Most people match out of sheer goodness and expect nothing in return, but it is a custom

before this time as productive and happy as you can, because you have no control over it.

We heard a rabbi once tell a beautiful story at a wedding (forgive the loose interpretation). He likened the bride to a pearl, who, when younger, was not ready to be the pearl that she is today. It took years of weathering life's storms for the pearl to get wiser, grow, show her true beauty and come out and shine. Subsequently, it took years for this pearl to be recognized and appreciated by the groom who also had to go through life to come to appreciate the true value of this pearl. Parents, just believe that your gem's true

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child is in good hands rather than being in no hands at all.

However, please keep in mind that while many of the matchmakers and rabbis work with the single and parents together, many others, including Sephardic Link, work directly with the single only. This is the reason many have come to us in the first place, and we cannot betray their trust. The agents made a vow and signed a confidentiality agreement which binds them exclusively to the single and prohibits the agent from ever telling a parent that their child is even on the site.

Singles are encouraged by the agents to keep their parents in the loop at all times, but without a single's permission, our lips are sealed. Singles know that everything discussed with an agent is between them and the agent, only. If they want information shared with a

that yields blessings for the couple so it's worth acknowledging!

We end this piece with a ray of reality and hope for singles and parents alike. This is not a religious-inspired philosophy, but nothing, as we all know in our hearts, can happen without G-d. A single can go to every party and event, go to matchmakers, and do everything right, but no matter what, it is going to happen when Hashem decides it will happen!

Also, timing is everything. When two people are destined to meet, it will happen and not a moment sooner. Keep in mind (in general), girls are programmed from an early age and may be ready to get married sooner than boys, who may need a few more years. No one, no matter how hard they try, can snap their fingers and make magic happen before its time, so make the days

value may shine at a young age, or take a few years longer than others. There is no telling what destiny holds for that gem, but their time will come and maybe there is a reason for the delay, a more divine plan. Nurture and polish that gem until it is ready, as it will not be ready before its destiny says it is. □

The preceding column is a culmination of the knowledge, feedback and advice that we, the administration and agents of Sephardic Link, have acquired thus far. We thank everyone who has guided us along the way. We have included much of their advice in our columns. Due to our strict discretion policy, we would never divulge anything personal, but rather make constructive suggestions based on the learning experience of others. Our past IMAGE articles can be viewed on the advice tab of Sephardiclink.com.

Remember, anything you see here should not replace the advice of rabbis, parents or experts in the field. For comments, feedback or suggestions for future topics, please email Kelly@Sephardiclink.com.