

4 Dating Tips:

How to Spot Lower Levels of Brain Integration

1. Your dating partner's words and actions don't quite line up.

Even if you can't quite make logical sense of the person as a whole, (their intentions, their self-expression, their life goals,) be careful about investing too much time and energy with someone who is not really making 100% sense to you. This tip is really about learning to trust your intuition, which is actually one of the nine functions of the prefrontal cortex.

Intuition can be defined as “a term that denotes the nonlogical knowing that emerges from the body, especially the neural networks in the heart and intestines that send their signals upward, through the insula, to the regions of the middle prefrontal cortex.”

Nine Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex

Together these functions serve to connect the body proper, brainstem, limbic area, cortex, and input from other people. ⁱ

1. **Empathy**—The ability to see the world through another person's perspective. ⁱⁱ
2. **Insight**—An inner sense of knowing. ⁱⁱⁱ
3. **Response flexibility**—The ability to respond flexibly... it allows the individual to pause and put a space between impulse and action. ^{iv}
4. **Emotion regulation**—Attaining enough intensity so that life has meaning, but not too much arousal for life to become chaotic or too little arousal for life to become rigid and depleted. ^v
5. **Body regulation**—Coordinating different systems of the body to function optimally...one example is balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system.
6. **Morality**—The capacity to imagine, reason, and enact behaviors on behalf of a larger social good. ^{vi}
7. **Intuition**—A term that denotes the nonlogical knowing that emerges from the body, especially the neural networks in the heart and intestines that send their signals upward, through the insula, to regions of the middle prefrontal cortex. ^{vii}
8. **Attuned communication**—A compassionate connection in a relationship...one example is when internal states are the focus of attention and are "attuned to" such that they become "seen" by another person. ^{viii}
9. **Fear modulation**—The ability to unlearn a fear.



2. You notice that your attention frequently drifts away from the person that you are dating, especially the more that you share intimate space together.

This skill is a hard one to first master, it has only developed for me after years of being a clinician. Basically, if a person has a Personality Disorder (see chapter 5 of [The Neuroscience of Dating](#) for a more detailed explanation of PDs) and/or lower levels of brain integration, they tend to see the world as full of objects to own, control, and conquer. PDs don't "do" relationship. This means they are a bit checked out in life: checked out in their relationship to self and checked out in their capacity to hold attuned communication with you. (See the above chart #8 for a definition for attuned communication.)

This tip means that over time, if you are with someone with lower levels of brain integration, you'll notice a feeling of not really being present with the other person. If you begin to notice this in your dating partner, just watch the feeling for a while, don't necessarily react out of it or say anything. Watch how the other person interacts with others, see if they seem checked out or distant from a lot of other people in their life.

3. You find yourself feeling defensive a lot.

If someone is criticizing you frequently, it's important to take a step back and examine, "Is it me?" Or "Is it you?" Probably if you are reading this and seriously considering it, it's not you. Think back to prior relationships, are you hearing criticism that you've heard before? Can you take the criticism and turn it into fuel to spur self-growth? In other words, is the criticism useful to you?

Or does the criticism make you feel low about yourself? Does this down feeling feel familiar? Did people in your past criticize you? Life is hard enough on its own without your dating partner making it tougher by sending you bad energy and unkind words.

Oftentimes if we grew up in dysfunctional households, we don't even know what emotionally healthy relationships look or feel like and are unconsciously attracted to patterns from our past. These attractions can have an enticing sexual edge to them, making the pull toward unhealthy relationships even stronger. In the long run, you want someone who is going to offer you a hand, help you stand up and wipe off your knees in the game of life, not someone who is going to push you to the ground.

This learning how to look at the fears and patterns that come from your past, then unlearning them in the present, thus creating a new and better future, requires fear modulation, (see #9 in the above chart).

4. You spend more time talking ABOUT your dating partner--posting on Facebook, texting, telling your friends--than you spend BEING with the person.

This tip refers to the postcard principle. If you are having so much fun on your vacation, who has time to STOP THE FUN and send a postcard home?

Growing a relationship with someone requires compromise and time. Of course, in the very beginning your dates may not be often due to specific circumstances or just the healthy time it takes to get to know and trust someone. I'm talking about a few months into the relationship, once you both know that you like each other and it's getting closer to being exclusive (or whatever you both want).

Some people are hermits and are very private people. It can take them a long time to open up. There's no reason not to be patient and love a hermit. What matters, though, if you're dating a hermit, (or someone who requires more distance than you,) is that you're honest with yourself about how you are feeling about the distance. Then, what also matters is that you feel empowered enough in the relationship to bring up your feeling that you want to be spending more time together AND that the other person acknowledges your feelings. This point is important.

When I write "acknowledge," I mean that the other person actually paraphrases how you are feeling and thinking, (thus demonstrating empathy, see #1 in the above chart). You can check during a conversation and say, "Could you tell me what you just heard me say? I want to know that you understood." Feeling heard and understood, as well as being able to acknowledge competing desires and wants as a couple, are important factors in order for a relationship to be able to stand the test of time. You can also check for empathy early on in dating by saying you have a headache or cold and seeing how long (or if ever) your dating partner gives some kind words back.

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