

Moving Beyond “Stuck in Love”

“Open to Love” means that you are open to partnership and will choose a partner based on acceptance of who you are, and acceptance of the other person realistically for who (s)he is. You decide whether or not the intimate partnership will enhance your life. While many single people at all ages state that they are open to explore “the right relationship,” they do not count on this for fulfillment. Some singles prefer the advantages of being alone and may not be actively seeking an intimate relationship. Others will keep their options open, but find it helpful to live their life “as if” they will remain single, so that they don’t put off major life decisions.

Many single people are hoping for intimate partnerships but find themselves repeatedly disappointed or stuck in relationships that are not working. It’s interesting that in many sitcoms the friendships tend to be the most solid and reliable, while romantic relationships are one disaster or problem after another. Some single adults will close themselves off from exploring the possibility of intimate partnerships because they are tired of disappointment, feel “there are no good ones left”, and would rather be resigned than take risks. Either orientation, “Stuck in Love” or “Stuck out of Love”, can result in feelings of being stuck, or in other words, frustrated in the wish to have an intimate partnership that works. Nonetheless, “Stuck in Love” relationships, while they can appear most dramatic and disastrous, can be a huge spur to our growth if we “work them” correctly.

“Stuck in Love” relationships are where you stay in relationships or keep finding relationships that don’t develop, grow, and become what you hope they would be.

You may be “stuck in love” if you...

- Obsess a lot, trying to “figure him or her out.”
- Are working extremely hard to make it “work.”
- Are on a roller-coaster of emotions and hope.
- Make excuses and too many compromises (e.g. breaking plans, tiptoeing around issues).
- Engage in fantasy, wishful and “if only” thinking, waiting for it to work.
- Don’t feel comfortable, accepted, or like your partner fits in your world.

- Are afraid to be “honest” with them about what you think and how you feel.
- Feel embarrassed and worry that your friends are getting sick of hearing about him (her).

There is a cost to being “stuck in love.” We can spend a lot of time and energy, tied up in knots, stirred up, and upset. Meanwhile, nothing changes. We have tunnel vision that keeps us closed off from relationship possibilities that might be more fruitful. We may not fully appreciate the people and experiences we have in our lives.

At the same time, although there is a cost to being “stuck in love,” some of us may actually feel comfortable in such relationships; they can provide a haven from feeling alone and protect us from having to take risks and feel vulnerable. In other words, some of us who actually fear relationships may “hide out” in unworkable situations because they are more comfortable and comforting than the alternative (e.g. loneliness, losing oneself in a relationships, feeling controlled).

So if you are caught in such a relationship, ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Are you afraid of real commitment or attachment so you find people with whom it won’t work?
- Do you doubt your judgments and fail to address (or know) what you need?
- Do you feel stigmatized and like a failure if you are not with someone?
- Are you confused because “everyone” including your parents likes him or her?
- Is what you are actually getting from the relationship worth the suffering?
- Do you feel being unhappy in a relationship is better than the alternative?
- Do you fear that you are “too picky” and that this is the “best you can do?”
- Are you letting fantasy and unrealistic hope get in the way of moving on in your life?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, applaud yourself for being honest and understand that you are not alone. But you now know that it is possible that you are choosing to be in such a relationship out of fear. You are going to want to identify these fears and challenge them. Most often grounded in our past experiences growing up, “Stuck in Love” patterns of relationship can be persistent and draining. You may want to get help from books, friends, support groups, or professionals in order to free yourself. But if you can acknowledge

your fears and get the support you need, you can move into “Open to Love” in SingleSpace.

There are many books and websites that help single people address problems in relationships. Several focus on the “stuck in love” or “stuck out of love” patterns and provide a framework for understanding such choices. If you are interested in reading more about this topic, you may want to return to the annotated **Resources and Links for Dating and Romance in MySingleSpace.**