

Don't let attraction hide the red flags



BEHAVIOUR TO WATCH

Excessive control. A partner who constantly demands to know your whereabouts, insists on checking your phone, or becomes upset when you make independent decisions may be attempting to control you.

Extreme jealousy and possessiveness. Repeated suspicion, accusations without evidence, or discomfort with your friendships may signal possessiveness rather than love. Healthy relationships are built on trust, not constant monitoring.

Isolation from friends, family. Be cautious if a partner discourages you from spending time with friends, family, or colleagues. Isolation increases emotional dependence and may limit your ability to seek support.

Belittling behaviour. Constant criticism, insults, or humiliation can erode confidence and signal deeper emotional or psychological problems. Mutual respect is essential for a healthy relationship.

Uncontrolled anger or intimidation. Frequent anger outbursts, threats, or unpredictable mood changes can indicate poor emotional control. Even when not directed physically at you, such behaviour creates fear and instability.

Suspicious Behaviour to Watch Out For



Excessive Control

Checking your phone, monitoring your activities.



Extreme Jealousy & Possessiveness

Constant suspicion & accusations.



Isolation from Friends & Family

Cutting you off from loved ones.



Disrespect & Belittling

Criticism & Humiliation.



Uncontrolled Anger

Yelling & Threats.



Rushing the Relationship

Pushing for quick commitment.

Don't ignore RED FLAGS!

Choosing a partner is not only about love, but also about safety, judgement, and long-term well-being. ILLUSTRATION/Al

Choosing a partner is not just about chemistry; sometimes it is about knowing which smelly armpits to tolerate and which red flags to run from.

BY SAMUEL SSETTUMBA

Is there a single formula by which to choose a partner with the intent of being mostly happy and enjoying a lasting relationship? There are many suggestions, and their abundance can even be confusing.

Research in this area, which asks what people consider when choosing partners, brings to the fore several factors, including humour, physical attractiveness, ambition, sensitivity, and more. Ultimately, however, the outcomes show that the process of choosing a romantic partner is heavily subjective at the individual level and can even override objective input from those around the person making the choice.

Is it possible to get it perfectly right while choosing a partner? Not likely. However, it is possible for our choice to enable better compatibility and create fewer areas of conflict, which can lead to a happier relationship. Such

a foundation also provides greater stability when the relationship faces shock waves such as severe financial distress.

Emotion vs rational judgement

In the dynamics of choosing a partner, two forces are especially at play in the beginning. First are very strong emotions, often loaded with sexual attraction, which can cloud judgement. Later comes the more rational consideration of who it is you are getting involved with.

Many heartaches and disappointments arise when decisions are made on the shallow foundation of emotions and sexual attraction, only to be followed by the realisation that more thought and consideration were necessary. In some instances, a child has already been conceived. This emotion-laden period may last weeks, months, or even years.

Start by knowing yourself

There is, however, a simple

approach that can help in the sometimes daunting task of choosing the right partner, despite our limitations in reading character and intent. This approach begins by asking yourself: how much do I know about myself?

When it comes to romantic relationships, clarity about your personal value system is essential. Understanding what matters to you adds a counterweight to the risks of allowing emotion and sexual attraction to dominate your decision-making. Establishing your value system strengthens the rational part of the partner selection process.

Identify what you cannot accept

Ask yourself: what are the things I cannot put up with in a partner?

There is no universal answer, but everyone has their own personal limits. This requires honest self-examination.

For example, some may say they would not accept a partner who does not pick up calls for extended periods or someone who never says thank you. A woman might say she would not accept a man who hesitates to pay the bill on a date. You may notice controlling behav-

iour, jealousy, or demands to check your phone, and this may not sit well with you.

These responses reflect your value system and help answer the question of compatibility. They help you recognise red flags early, using your own values as a reference point.

What you can tolerate and what you can overlook

The second layer of your value system involves things you can tolerate. These are important, but because your partner meets your core expectations, you are willing to accept them.

For instance, some may tolerate occasional inability to pay bills if their partner is honest. Others may tolerate minor hygiene issues such as smelly armpits because their partner is respectful or thoughtful.

The third layer includes things that are normally important but which you can overlook without much concern. For example, a partner may chew loudly while eating, or have oral hygiene habits that you believe can be improved with time.

Creating this personal list helps you identify problems early. Even when emotionally attached, respecting your own value system helps you

recognise incompatibility. It also helps you understand your own needs and vulnerabilities, which might otherwise disadvantage you in the relationship.

Do not rush the process

This approach is less effective when choosing a partner in a hurry or under intense emotional influence. Take time to observe the person as you date. Learn about them from others who know them. Do not open yourself up fully at the beginning; instead, open up gradually.

This requires self-control, because choosing a partner can have serious consequences and can affect your wellbeing profoundly.

Taking time also allows another important factor to emerge: intuition.

Trust your intuition

Have you ever been interested in someone but felt, deep inside, that something was not right? Many people dismiss such feelings because there is no immediate proof.

These instinctive feelings are often accurate and should not be ignored. Slow down and observe carefully. Look for evidence as you get to know the person better. You may discover

important warning signs that your rational analysis initially missed.

It is possible that some victims of serious harm sensed danger but ignored their instincts.

Having a personal value system prevents one of life's most important decisions from being driven solely by fleeting emotional and sexual attraction. It introduces rationality into the process.

After all, finding a partner is not just a feeling. It is also a decision, one on which many future feelings, both good and bad, will depend.

Observe behaviour

Experts emphasise that a person's character is revealed through consistent behaviour, especially during disagreement, frustration, or stress. Taking time to know someone, maintaining personal independence, and trusting your instincts can help reduce the risk of entering a harmful relationship. Choosing a partner is not only about love, but also about safety, judgement, and long-term well-being.

Samuel Ssettumba is a professional counsellor majoring in marital issues