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DATING

Slow down to avoid falling for a jerk

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It's a common scenario: You're madly in love for a month or two. A few months later, you can't stand each other.

Relationship expert John Van Epp will deliver a talk, "How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk or Jerkette," at the University of Rhode Island on Friday, March 1. Based on his book of the same name, the lecture will delve into how to build strong and healthy relationships and avoid becoming attached to someone who will ultimately make you miserable.

So, how does Van Epp define a jerk within the context of a relationship? "Everyone at one time or another has acted like a jerk," he said. "But the difference between acting like one and being one is that jerks always reveal the same core characteristic. They have a repetitive unwillingness to change whatever it is that hurts the people they care about."

Van Epp's main tip is the opposite of what's typically portrayed in romantic movies and novels. It's also something many people don't want to hear: Slow

SEE VAN EPP, H2

VAN EPP

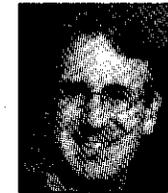
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URI talk looks at how to avoid falling for a jerk

down and pace yourself in the relationship.

"You cannot make good judgments going 100 miles an hour," said the Florida-based psychologist. "I would call it reclaiming a confidence in setting limits. In any relationship, it takes a while to figure out if this person's going to be a good fit, and yet we get into romantic relationships and expect it to be more accelerated."

So, for example, go out with your friends on Friday night instead of spending the whole weekend with your love interest, or perhaps resist the urge to text message each other constantly.



Van Epp

The key, according to Van Epp, is to allow enough time to get to know the real person — beyond your projection of them — before falling head over heels.

Here are his top three things to learn about someone in the early stages of dating:

1 Get to know how they treat people other than you and assume that's how they're eventually going to treat you, too. Find out about the person's relationship with his or her friends, family and coworkers. For example, ask if he did anything special for his mother for her birthday or observe how he relates to authority figures. If she's constantly complaining about her boss, Van Epp said, that might be a red flag.

2 Learn about his or her history. History repeats itself, Van Epp said, so learn about a person's past relationships. Ask questions such as: What did your previous partners like about you? How did they treat you? What did you like about them? What did you not get along about?

3 Make sure you differentiate between patterns and events. If, for example, you start going out with someone in January and they treat you wonderfully on Valentine's Day, that's a one-time event, not a pattern of behavior, Van Epp said. If the person treats you well on several special occasions, that's a pattern. Also, look at patterns in terms of how someone reacts to stress. Is an episode of anger — with you or others — an isolated event or a regular occurrence?

Van Epp's talk is Friday, March 1, from 3:30-5 p.m. at the University of Rhode Island's Thomas M. Ryan Family Auditorium of the Center for Biotechnology and Life



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