Dating While HIV Positive

POZ Personals members share their dating advice.

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Looking for something relatable to discuss on that first date? How about a universal truth: Dating is difficult. It's hard for everyone—and that's without factoring in such concerns as when to disclose your HIV status or the stigma attached to the virus.

You're not only imagining the candlelit romance of your first kiss, you're picturing his or her face when you disclose. If your date's HIV negative, you're also thinking about how he or she will react. These situations can be tough to navigate—so who better to give advice on dating while living with HIV than POZ Personals members?

Here, a few members share both their bad and good dating experiences so you can learn from them. After all, having HIV doesn't mean your romantic life has to be anything less than happy.

On nerves and dates

"It's just lunch. Just like that popular dating service, it is just lunch. So don't go back and forth for months waiting to meet. After the first day or two of chatting, go have lunch. Because you both have to eat, don't you? So why not have a meal, and then if it doesn't work, it's not the end of the world."

—K. Anderson

"Dating is about listening. Your post or ad has spoken. Have a conversation—have several conversations—and exchange emails. Listen to the other person. Read what he has written. Dating is not a monologue. It's a dialogue. Hearing someone's voice on different days/nights, gives you a lot of information. There are no bad dates. Even an apparent disaster, a bar encounter at which the other person succeeds in quickly getting drunk, for example, can be useful. You will stick to having a cup of coffee by meeting at a cafe next time."

—Winthrop Smith

On knowing yourself

"First, the basics haven't changed: Know yourself before you start. If/when you don't know who you are, it's impossible to describe yourself, physically, mentally, emotionally, financially. If you don't know who you are, you won't be able to market yourself, and dating falls under marketing.

“Second, every interaction with someone has dating potential, which means that when you meet someone for work, at work, especially doing something that you enjoy doing or shopping at the grocery store, the hardware store, he might be there, be the one. Just don’t forget why you are encountering this person and confuse a work meeting with dating. Keep the two separate.”

—Winthrop Smith

“Learn as much as you can about each other, no lies, be honest. Don’t go on and on about your ex; keep it in the past.”

—Jessica Bunn

On the dating pool

“Do the numbers. If you live in a small town in a small state, what percentage of men are gay? What percentage of those gay men are positive or open to dating someone who is positive? If you limit yourself to finding someone around the block, you may have created an insurmountable challenge. The reality is that he could be anywhere, could live anywhere. He might, or might not, live across the country. He might, or might not, use a dating site, a dating company, have, or not have, a personal ad somewhere. Try to stay open.”

—Winthrop Smith

“I moved from LA to New Mexico. It’s given me an understanding of how difficult it is for those not living in a big city. There are no support groups, no social activities with other positive people out here; there are no retreats that those of us who are low-income can afford.

“We are still dealing with the stereotypes and discrimination out here…my suggestion to HIV-positive people not living in the city is that you really have to be willing to create change by moving or spending more time in the cities so you can access a larger dating pool of people.”

—Eddie W.

“My experience is that when you become a gay man—positive or not—in the age group of 55-plus, your dating experience becomes one of no experience. We as gay folk ignore our possible candidates for dating in this group.”

—rpcarguy

On disclosing your status

“It is always the best practice to let someone know your status at the first opportunity. Sites like POZ Personals and options on dating apps have made it much easier to let an interested suitor know you status by reading your profile. If meeting someone the old-fashioned way, let them know before the end of that first date/conversation so that they have all the information they need before moving forward. Many, many guys know nothing about HIV and fear positive individuals as one would fear someone who had contracted the Ebola virus. No matter how hot that guy looks, avoid an awkward, embarrassing or even violent situation by laying all your cards on the table at

the appropriate time. The appropriate time is soon after meeting."

—Jerry

"I have been single since diagnosis in 2003. Since then, I have not had so much as a second date with someone. Have tried disclosing up front (before they had a chance to get to know me) as well as later but before sex (only to be told that I'd broken their trust). Always the same result: They move on, and I need to find the strength to start looking again. Have been told I don't need those types in my life. Agreed. Yet after 15 years, little hope remains of not dying alone—my greatest fear. Ironically, I have never had any medical issues. Just when others hear those three letters they make a fast exit."

—Todd

On safety

"The first time is the best sign. I just experienced a bit of physical 'shoving' with my boyfriend. Yes, he had alcohol; yes, there is a history of anger management incidents. What is online is true—this condition does not improve, and the perpetrator of the violence never owns or acknowledges it."

—Tomás Díaz-Lee

"Be very careful in giving out personal information (cell phone numbers, addresses, pictures, etc.) too soon. Learn more about the other person."

—William

On compatibility

"When you look at a profile and you see that you don't have anything in common, like the person loves to go hiking every weekend and you don't like to hike, you probably don't want to fool yourself into thinking that you will date. Then if you are a 'Netflix, lay around the house' guy on the weekend and he is a 'hike every mountain trail on the weekend' kind of guy."

—K. Anderson

"Dating takes time. The first interaction(s) is/are usually false: Each of you is likely presenting a version of yourself that you believe the other is seeking. After all, you both have read each other's ad. Gradually, the wall comes down, and each of you relaxes, letting your real self peek out. Allow time for that to happen. True, many men are convinced that they will know immediately if someone is 'the one,' a 'keeper,' and so refuse to take small steps. What they might miss out on is someone who doesn't have partner potential but could become their closest friend."

—Winthrop Smith

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