

FIELD NOTE BONUS

Modern Dating Catch-Up

Prepare a profile, start a conversation and plan a first meeting at your own pace.

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OUTCOME

You have a practical starting point for dating, if and when you want to.

First: you do not need to become good at dating

If your last period of being single was many years ago, some ways of meeting and arranging dates may be unfamiliar. That does not erase what you know about people or relationships.

Use this bonus for the next step you have actually chosen: deciding whether to start, preparing a profile, sending a message or arranging a meeting. It does not require you to date, buy an app subscription or turn dating into another job.

Begin with a sentence for yourself: "I would like to meet someone for..." Be honest about what you want and what time you can offer. It is acceptable to be uncertain, provided you do not promise certainty to somebody else.

If dating is not a priority, stop here and return when it is. The rest of your Catch-Up work still counts.

What changed

You may encounter app profiles, messaging before meeting, video calls and relatively short first meetings. Some people date more than one person before agreeing exclusivity; others prefer one connection at a time. Neither assumption should substitute for a conversation.

There is no single modern rulebook. Local habits, age, culture, orientation and individual preferences vary. Use the practical questions that apply across those differences:

Are we both interested in continuing?

Are we being accurate about our situation and intentions?

Have we agreed what the next step is?

Does the pace feel comfortable to both of us?

If an expectation is unclear, ask. "Would you prefer a call before meeting?" is more useful than guessing how all dates are supposed to work now.

Apps

Treat an app as one possible way to meet people, not the definition of dating. You can also meet through introductions or activities, while respecting that people at an activity may not be looking for dates.

If you want to try an app:

Ask about local options or compare the platforms' current descriptions for the age range and kind of connection you want. Popularity in another city does not establish usefulness in yours.

Read what is available free, any paid terms and how to pause or delete your account before subscribing.

Start with one account you can maintain. Set honest preferences and use the platform's security and privacy settings.

Choose a small period to check it, such as fifteen minutes in the evening. Adjust or pause if it is taking time you want for other things.

You do not have to buy extra features because the first few interactions lead nowhere. Review whether the platform, profile and process suit you before adding more accounts or spending more.

Profile

A useful profile answers three questions: **what you look like now, what you enjoy and what kind of connection you are open to.** It should give someone an honest starting point for a conversation.

Draft it in three parts:

A brief description of your actual life, without identifying private details.

Two specific interests you would be happy to discuss or share.

What you are hoping to meet someone for, in words you can stand behind.

Avoid a full divorce history, complaints about former partners or a long list of requirements. If something affects your availability or relationship status, represent it accurately. "Separated" and "divorced" are not interchangeable descriptions.

Before saving, read it aloud. Remove claims you would feel awkward explaining on a date. You do not need to seem more adventurous or available than you really are.

Photos

Select a small set that serves different purposes:

Clear face photo: recent enough to represent your appearance now.

Full-body casual photo: ordinary clothes you feel comfortable wearing.

Activity photo: something you actually do, rather than a staged claim about your lifestyle.

Optional extra: a different setting or smarter outfit if it adds useful context.

You do not need five near-identical images. Ask a friend to take a few in daylight, then check focus, cropping and the app's preview. Avoid heavy editing that changes your appearance. Your Look explains a simple outfit and fit check if that is holding you up.

Keep children's pictures and identifying details out of a public dating profile. Check backgrounds for addresses or workplace information. Be cautious about linking social accounts or reusing professional-profile images if you want those identities separate. See RAINN's privacy guidance for dating.

Done: someone can see what you currently look like without your profile exposing information you want private.

Bio

Use details that invite an ordinary question. Write as you would speak, and only include things that are true for you.

EXAMPLE

Illustrative bio, not a customer profile: "Dad of two, work in logistics, happiest near water or somewhere with good food. Back into cycling and trying to become less terrible at golf. Interested in meeting someone for relaxed dates and seeing where it goes."

This gives the reader several possible topics and an indication of intent. Adapt the structure; do not copy a life that is not yours.

If you do not have a headline hobby, ordinary specifics still work: the food you like cooking, local walks, a kind of film or the way you enjoy a free afternoon. "Loyal, honest, love to laugh" tells someone less about spending time with you.

Edit test: can a reader ask a question about at least one real detail? If not, replace a general adjective with an example.

Messaging

The purpose is to find out whether you both want to keep talking and possibly meet. Start with a genuine detail in their profile and one question. Share something of your own as the conversation develops; a sequence of questions alone can feel like an interview.

EXAMPLE

Illustrative opening: "You mentioned walking by the coast. Is there a local route you'd recommend? I've mostly been doing the same inland loop."

Possible continuation, if they respond: answer their question, say what interested you in the reply and add one related thought. You do not need a prepared script for the whole exchange.

Write at a length that gives the other person something manageable to answer. Avoid sexual comments unless that direction is clearly welcome. Do not manufacture interest by deliberately ignoring messages, and do not assume a quick reply guarantees compatibility.

When there is mutual interest, suggest the next step. If either person wants more conversation or a call first, respect that. A fixed number of days is not a requirement.

Keep early conversations on the app if you want its reporting tools and do not feel obliged to share your number. **Do not send money or gifts to someone you have not met in person.** If an online contact asks you to fund an emergency or an investment, stop and verify independently; report suspected fraud to the platform. If you have already paid, contact the payment provider promptly. The FTC's romance-scam guidance explains these patterns.

Asking for the date

Offer a plan that is easy to understand and adjust:

"Enjoying talking with you. Would you like to meet for coffee at the town-centre café? Thursday after work or Saturday morning would work for me."

If they accept, agree the specific time and place. If they prefer another venue or a call first, discuss that. If they decline, accept the answer. An invitation is an offer, not a negotiation you must win.

If the answer stays vague, you can say: "No problem. Let me know if you'd like to arrange something." Then keep your own plans moving. Do not keep a whole weekend free for a meeting that has not been agreed.

Done: you either have a confirmed plan, an agreed next step or a clear reason to leave the conversation where it is.

First date

Pick a plan you can both comfortably afford and leave after a reasonable first meeting. Coffee, a drink or a simple meal can work. An hour is one possible starting plan, not a required duration or a promise of a second date.

For meeting somebody new, choose a populated public place, arrange your own transport and tell a trusted person the plan. Keep your phone charged and know how you can leave. You may end the meeting if you feel uncomfortable; these precautions reduce some risks but cannot guarantee safety. See RAINN's guidance for meeting in person.

Make the conversation ordinary: ask about something from the profile, share an example of your own and leave room for their questions. You do not need to present a résumé or assess every future compatibility question in one sitting.

At the end, say what you mean. "I've enjoyed this and would like to see you again" is useful if true. If unsure, you can thank them without promising another date. Payment, a pleasant conversation or accepting an invitation does not create an obligation to continue or become physically intimate.

EXAMPLE

Illustrative first-date plan: Saturday coffee at 11, venue and entrance agreed, travel arranged separately. Afterwards, decide whether you want to suggest another meeting. The result is a clearer decision, even if the answer is no.

What to wear

Start with the actual venue, weather and activity. Try on a complete outfit in advance so a missing clean shirt or uncomfortable shoes do not become a last-minute problem.

Use Your Look's casual example for a daytime café or walk, and its smart-casual example for a venue where that suits the setting. If the venue publishes a dress code, follow that instead of a general example.

Keep the practical check simple: clean, comfortable, suitable for the place, and recognisably you. There is no need for a costume, a brand purchase or clothes chosen only to look younger.

Talking about the divorce

Be accurate without making the whole meeting an account of what went wrong. A short answer can acknowledge the history, your current situation and what you are doing now.

“We were together a long time. The relationship ended, and I'm getting used to running my own routine. I'm interested in meeting people again.”

Use that only if it describes your situation. If the separation is ongoing, say so. You can keep legal or family details private without implying they are resolved when they are not.

If questions become more detailed than you want at a first meeting, try: “I'm happy to talk about it more as we get to know each other. I'd rather not spend all of today on the separation.” Then move to another subject. Avoid diagnosing your ex or inviting a new person to decide who was right.

Children

Be honest that you have children and about availability that affects making plans. You do not need to publish their names, school, routines or private family information.

A practical message might be: “I have my children this weekend. Tuesday evening would work for me.” That gives enough information to arrange the date without sharing a full parenting schedule.

Keep early dating separate from introductions to children. Before an introduction, consider the relationship's stability, your children's needs and any relevant agreements or professional guidance for your family. There is no universal week-count in this guide. Do not make introductions simply because childcare is inconvenient, and do not ask children to keep a relationship secret from a parent.

Exclusivity

Do not infer exclusivity from the number of dates, regular messages or physical affection. If you want an exclusive relationship, say what that means to you and ask whether the other person wants the same thing.

“I'd like to focus on this and stop dating other people. Is that something you want too?”

If they say yes, clarify anything important, such as whether dating-app use stops. If they are unsure or want something different, decide whether that arrangement works for you. Agreement needs to be mutual; an ambiguous reply is not a yes.

Consent to physical or sexual contact is a separate, ongoing matter. Ask when unsure, respect a no or a change of mind, and never treat exclusivity or previous intimacy as automatic permission.

Rejection

A non-match or unanswered message tells you that this interaction is not progressing. It does not reliably tell you why. Avoid filling that uncertainty with a conclusion about every potential partner or your overall worth.

If you have an established conversation and a practical question is unanswered, one brief follow-up can be reasonable. **After a clear no, do not follow up to persuade them.** If there is still no response, leave the interaction and put your attention back into your existing plans.

When you are the one declining, clarity can be considerate: "Thanks for meeting. I don't feel the connection I'm looking for, but I wish you well." You do not need to provide a detailed critique. If you feel unsafe, prioritise ending contact rather than explaining yourself.

Ghosting

An early conversation can stop without an explanation. Do not search for the person across platforms, contact their friends or send repeated messages to obtain an answer.

If you have been on dates and want to check once, a simple message is enough:

"I've enjoyed seeing you. Would you like to meet again? It's fine if not; I just wanted to ask directly."

If they do not answer, stop arranging your time around them. You may dislike the lack of clarity while still choosing not to pursue it. A genuinely urgent concern involving someone you know well is a different situation from silence after light early contact.

The ego trap

Long relationship experience can help you listen, compromise and recognise what matters to you. The unfamiliar task may simply be **getting to know someone before there is a shared relationship**.

After a date, review behaviour you can actually observe:

Was conversation reasonably mutual?

Did I feel able to be accurate about myself?

Did we respect each other's preferences and boundaries?

Would I choose another meeting, apart from wanting to be chosen?

Use those answers to decide the next step. Do not make a successful marriage history, a difficult divorce or an impressive job into proof that a stranger should want another date.

The “do I even want this?” question

Ask what is drawing you to dating now. Curiosity, companionship, attraction and wanting a relationship can be reasons to explore it. Pressure from friends or an ex's new relationship does not create a deadline for you.

Try a practical check: **Do I want to meet this person, do I have time for the plan, and can I be honest about what I am offering?** You do not have to reach a perfect emotional state before meeting anyone, but another person's attention should not be the only thing holding your week together.

If the process is taking more than you want to give, pause it. You can spend that time on friends, home, interests or support and return later. Deciding “not now” is a usable decision, not a failed assessment.

FAQ

QUICK ANSWERS

01 Which dating app is best?

There is no single best choice for every location or intention. Compare current local options, free features, privacy settings and paid terms. Start with one you understand and review whether it is useful before adding another.

02 How long should I message before meeting?

Until you both want and feel comfortable with the next step. You can suggest a simple meeting when interest is mutual, or a call first. No fixed number of messages or days establishes trust.

03 Should I pay on the first date?

Preferences differ. You can offer or suggest splitting: "Shall we split this?" Choose a plan you can afford either way and respect the other person's preference. Paying never creates an obligation for affection, sex or another date.

04 Should I mention that I am divorced in the profile?

Represent your relationship status accurately if the app asks, and do not conceal an ongoing separation. How much detail belongs in a short bio depends on context; practical honesty does not require a full history.

05 How soon should I introduce somebody to my children?

There is no universal timetable here. Consider your children, the stability of the relationship and any relevant family arrangements. Keep their privacy and needs separate from the convenience of making a date happen.

06 Is dating harder now?

Different methods introduce different demands. Focus on whether the process suits you and whether a particular connection is worth continuing. This guide cannot promise matches or a relationship.

You're done when...

YOU'RE DONE WHEN

- ☐ You understand the basic modern dating environment.
- ☐ You know which apps you would use if you choose to.
- ☐ You have a current photo baseline.
- ☐ You know how to move from messaging to a date.
- ☐ You have a simple first-date plan.
- ☐ You know how to discuss divorce without making it the date.
- ☐ You understand that dating competence and relationship competence are different things.