



men dating survival guide

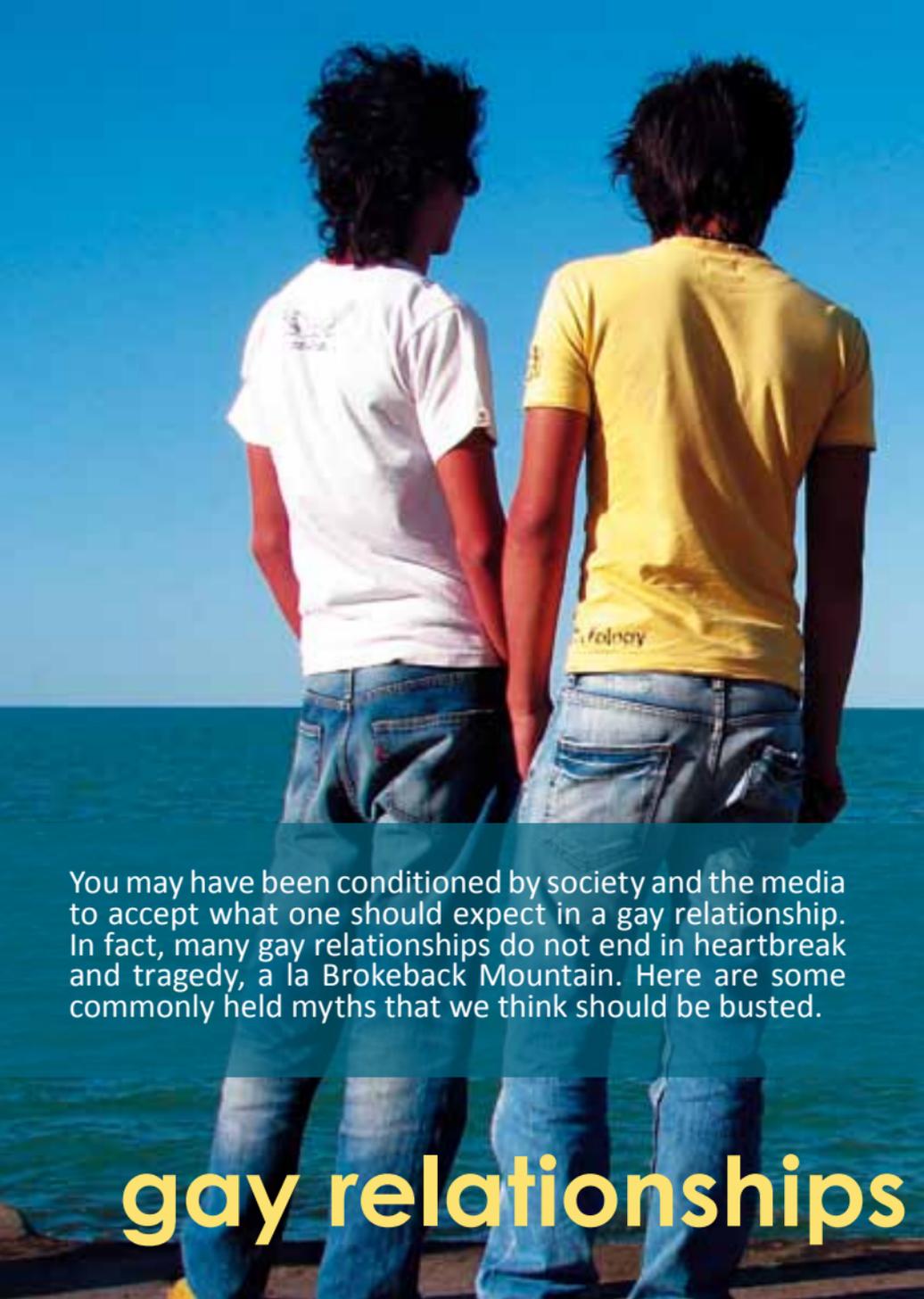




introduction

So you have gone to bars and put up your profiles in gay portals and Grindr, and you go out with friends every weekend hoping to eventually meet 'the One'. But he's still out there – elusive and not quite yours yet. What can you do?

This is why we wrote this booklet – one specifically targeted at the average gay Singaporean, regardless of race, language, or religion. We hope the tips in this booklet will be of use to you. You may not become the next gay Casanova, but if you do, we hope you'll let us know.



You may have been conditioned by society and the media to accept what one should expect in a gay relationship. In fact, many gay relationships do not end in heartbreak and tragedy, a la Brokeback Mountain. Here are some commonly held myths that we think should be busted.

gay relationships

Myth One: There must be a top and bottom in a gay relationship.

Not true. Don't worry if you think your date doesn't fit the mold—a relationship can work outside of the traditional dominant-submissive model. Part of the joy of being gay is the fluidity and flexibility that comes with how you define yourself in a relationship. Of course, you may prefer playing a particular sexual role in bed, but remember that all relationships are unique and may evolve over time. Don't be afraid of seeing someone you ordinarily won't think of dating - it just might work!

Myth Two: Gay relationships don't last.

While being in a gay relationship in Singapore presents its challenges, there are many gay couples who have withstood the test of time. Getting involved in gay support groups is an excellent way of meeting people in long-term relationships. Seek their advice. And hey, look at how many famous gay couples there are out there: Elton John and David Furnish, Neil Patrick Harris and David Burtka, the list goes on. Take heart!

Myth Three: Gay relationships are doomed to fail because gays are promiscuous.

Monogamy is an issue which should be discussed frankly with your partner early in the relationship. Some healthy relationships are sustained on the mutual understanding that sexual liaisons with other people may happen. On the other hand, you and your partner may choose to remain monogamous because it is important to you. Again, each and every relationship is different. Trust and open communication with your partner will result in a committed and happy union.

myths versus facts

know yourself first

They say know your enemies and you win all wars. In dating, this is not totally true. We think you have to know yourself first. Know who you are as a gay person, your reasons for getting into a relationship, or which type of gay people rocks your boat will help. It reduces your search time and helps you find Mr. Right sooner.

1. Your motivations

Before you do anything, ask yourself this first: why get into a relationship? Do you wish to find someone to care about? Or someone to care for you? Or a sexy dance partner to show off to your friends? Asking yourself this question is important. You will realise this influences the kind of guys you search for and prevent yourself from aimlessly moving around, like driftwood, from partner to partner.

2. Your values and beliefs

Understanding your own sexuality, values and boundaries is important. Some people can accept an open relationship, some cannot. Some are more adventurous and liberal and want a polygamous relationship.

Are you a gay man with strong religious belief and is trying to come to terms with your identity? How open are you regarding your own sexuality? A couple with different comfort level with sexuality may face different stresses. Some gay people may even have a negative perception of gay relationships! If you are one of them, this severely reduces the odds of you entering into a stable, healthy relationship. Do consider talking to a professional if you have serious issues long overdue.



3. Your type

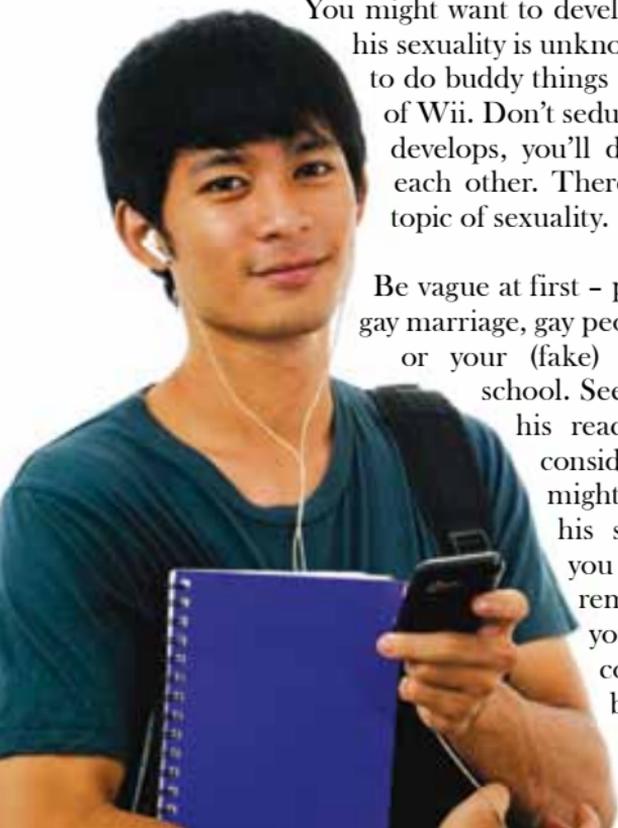
Some gay people have a list. They want their potential partners to be handsome, rich, and muscular. What is your list? It doesn't matter if skin-deep qualities are the most important to you - as long as you admit it to yourself. Relationship counsellors advise writing down a list of qualities you find attractive in a potential partner (ranging from things like height, build, ethnicity to personality, demeanor and his family life). Doing so will clarify things for yourself, and help you to stay focused in your search for an ideal mate.

finding out if a guy is gay

Okay, you've found someone. He's truly awesome and honestly you think he would be your soul mate for, like, forever. The only thing is: you don't know if he's gay. What should you do?

You might want to develop a friendship first, since his sexuality is unknown. Start with inviting him to do buddy things - a movie, pool, or a game of Wii. Don't seduce him. As your friendship develops, you'll develop a mutual trust for each other. Thereafter you can broach the topic of sexuality.

Be vague at first - point out to him issues like gay marriage, gay people serving in the military, or your (fake) gay friend in secondary school. See how he reacts. If you like his reaction, you might want to consider coming out to him. He might catch the bait and disclose his sexuality. If he's not gay, you can still be friends. (And remember, try as you might, you will never be able to convert a straight man into becoming gay.)





What kinds of relationships are you interested in? There are many arrangements and sociologists have studied them for ages. Here's a helpful summary of the possible configurations:

Monogamous relationship - one where the two parties in a relationship have exclusive sex (i.e. no sexual contact with outsiders)

Polygamous relationship - one where more than two parties in a relationship have exclusive sex (like a three person relationship)

Open relationship - the two parties in a relationship agree to have casual sexual flings (usually no emotional involvement) with parties outside of the relationship. There are various types of open relationships.

Fuck buddies or friends with benefits - having non-committal, ongoing sex with gay friends

Friendships - duh. No sex involved!

There are implications both sexually and emotionally for each arrangement. If you intend to have a monogamous relationship, it is important to communicate that to your partner, who may be more sexually adventurous and wants an open relationship. Also, are you falling in love with your fuck buddy? Watch out. He might not be that into you (no pun intended)!

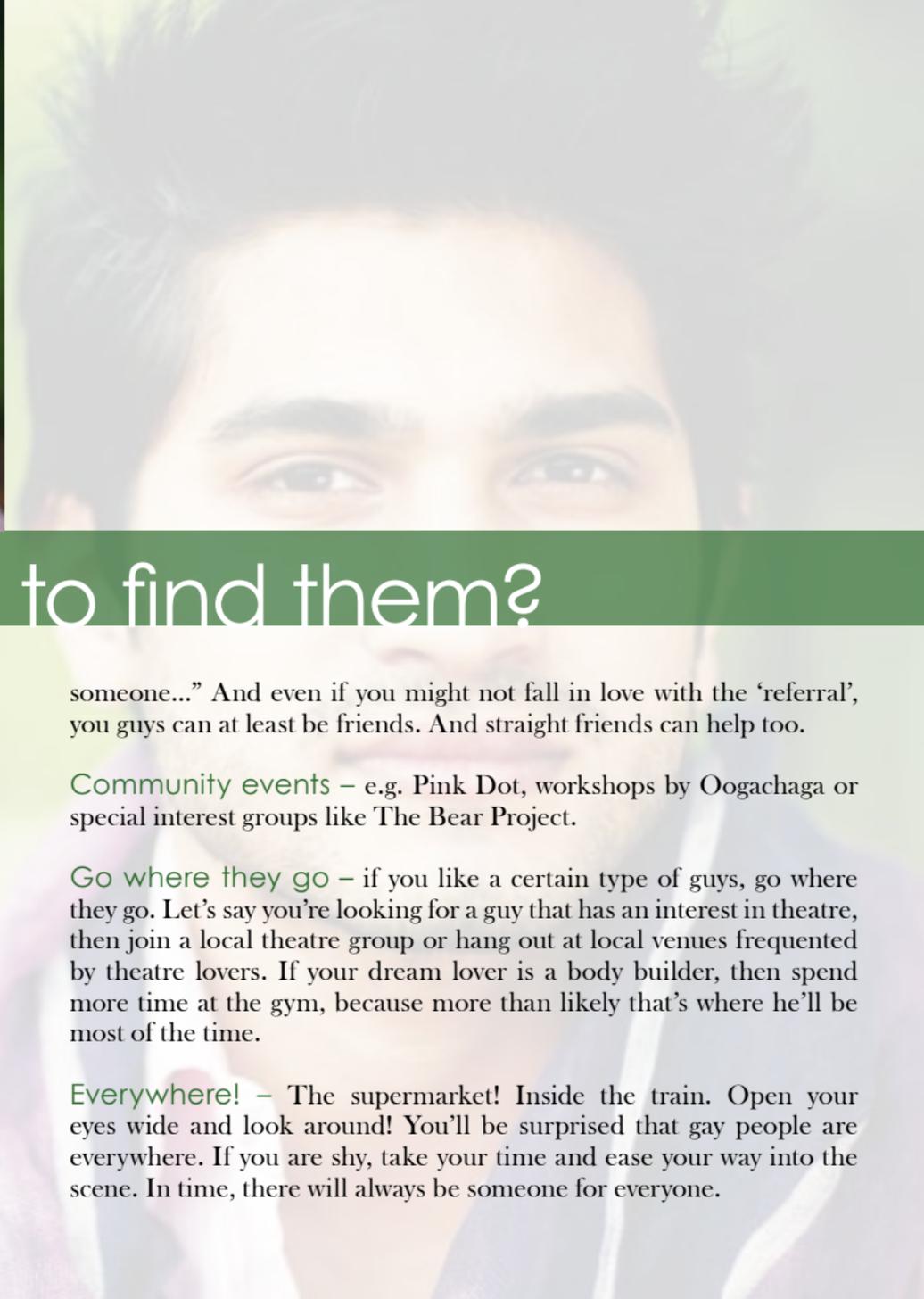


where

Online chat rooms or dating sites – are you looking for sex or love? Whatever it is, be clear. Write it down on your profile. State clearly the kind of guys you are looking out for and the circumstances under which you are willing to meet. But remember, having a headless naked body or close up shot of your family jewels will attract different types of men, even if you state that you are looking for long term relationship.

Gay venues (clubs/bars) – there are many gay men who live for a weekend of dancing. If you are intimidated by the bigger lounges, there are many smaller, less intimidating ones that are great meeting places too. Heterosexual clubs are good too – many gays go to straight clubs with their straight friends.

Referrals from friends/co-workers – this is actually one of the best ways to meet a guy, given that your friends and co-workers would know your personality traits and the type you are looking for. So if your friends are not busy setting you up, ask them to. You'll be amazed at the number of times you'll hear: "Now that you say, I do know of



to find them?

someone...” And even if you might not fall in love with the ‘referral’, you guys can at least be friends. And straight friends can help too.

Community events – e.g. Pink Dot, workshops by Oogachaga or special interest groups like The Bear Project.

Go where they go – if you like a certain type of guys, go where they go. Let’s say you’re looking for a guy that has an interest in theatre, then join a local theatre group or hang out at local venues frequented by theatre lovers. If your dream lover is a body builder, then spend more time at the gym, because more than likely that’s where he’ll be most of the time.

Everywhere! – The supermarket! Inside the train. Open your eyes wide and look around! You’ll be surprised that gay people are everywhere. If you are shy, take your time and ease your way into the scene. In time, there will always be someone for everyone.

how to **approach**



someone?

Take the initiative

Most gay men wait for others to take the initiative. Everyone wants a handsome guy to walk up and talk to them. But if everyone's waiting to be approached, there would be no one doing the talking. Why not practice getting out of your comfort zone? Find a guy you like and start a conversation. Take a deep breath, smile warmly and say "hi". To many gay men, the thought of doing this is terrifying, but with practice it will get more comfortable.

What to say?

Okay, you have spotted someone. What do you say? Two things here: break the ice and talk about something in common. Find something unique about him and comment on it humorously. Instead of "Hey, your shirt is really nice", try phrasing it in a more creative way: "You know, there are those who can never pull off a checkered shirt, but it just looks great on you."

If you get stuck, offer to buy him a drink. This buys you more time to think about something to talk about. Then find a common topic to talk about. Both of you may be (surprise surprise) from the same alma mater, or army unit, or in the same line of work. Do not rush into the fact-finding (age/top/btm/flex/shoe-size/work/place/seek) mode immediately.



do's/don'ts in the early stages of dating

Don't pour out your sorrows - In the earlier stages, avoid talking about tragic or miserable past experiences. **NOBODY** wants to date someone who is preoccupied with his past.

Don't jump into bed after your first date - This may be hard, but ask yourself this: do you like this guy for now or forever? If you are looking for your lifetime partner, generally it would be better to delay having sex. This is to prevent yourself from sending the wrong message. Remind yourself this: the process of getting to know a gay partner requires investment in time and effort.

Don't mention your ex - Mentioning your former partner on the first date is a bad idea. It doesn't matter if you broke up with him or he passed away; stay clear of this for now. Also, avoid trashing your ex at all costs. It's a major turn off, shows that you are ungentlemanly and leads one to think, "What's he going to say about me later on?"

Don't be obsessive - If the other person doesn't call, he might have been too busy to answer. Leaving five voice mails after the first date can scare your date away.

Do bring your wallet - Even if he was the one who invited you out, you should be prepared to go dutch. And if you guys are trying out a new restaurant, have extra cash in case of surprises.

Do listen - Don't blabber on and on about yourself. Remember: good communication is two-way. Take your time to get to know each other and let the details of your life and emotions naturally unfold. This ensures none of you gets overwhelmed prematurely in the relationship.

Do dress up - Find out where you guys are going. It would not be nice if you are denied entry into a swanky restaurant because of your "Mr Cute" tee shirt. And you might want to skip wearing white - gravy that is splattered on white shirts looks especially conspicuous. Also, your bright pink super small tee shirt which accentuates your tight pecs may be too much for him to take - and are you sure you want to invite that many glares on your first date?

Do keep the first few dates short and sweet - As the old saying goes: "Less is more." Keep the meeting short and sweet. However, do be observant and present to the occasion; tune into him and your feelings. Remember, this is the first impression he'll get of you.

Do bring a condom - Although we recommend that you do not jump into bed immediately, always bring condoms because you would not know when you need them. To make sex more pleasurable, bring some water-based lubricants too. If you are caught without them, grab some from a convenience store. Small satchets condom packs and lubricants are available from Oogachaga or Action for AIDS.

dealing with **rejection**



Rejection can come in many forms during the stage of dating. It could be your date telling you in your face after the third date that he thinks you are “not the right one”. Or that he announced on Facebook that he is in a “It’s complicated” relationship - which, by the way, doesn’t involve you. Or he simply vanished without a trace, or an SMS. Any SMS.

If you are rejected, it is natural to be upset, angry and put the blame on yourself. The reality is this: it is usually the other party’s problem, not yours. He might have his own demons to fight. Or perhaps he thinks that it is not going to work between the both of you, but is not willing to talk about it. The best thing we can do is to face reality and move on. Keep things in perspective by focusing on the many positive aspects of your life. Know that you are worthy and deserving.

The fear of rejection cripples us from moving on. It stops us from approaching someone we really like. Confidence is the only cure to rejection. Engage in fun activities and positive thinking. If you feel good about yourself, you’ll be able to recognise the great truths about yourself too. The more confident you are, the more at ease you are with yourself and the better you will be able to cope with most forms of rejection.

One more thing, if you are not at the receiving end of rejection, you may be someone rejecting others. If that is the case, be honest. If you are not going to call, admit it. Request to leave the date there and then politely. When you lie to others, their feeling of rejection is compounded.

Another interesting facet of rejection is that there are people out there who will try to reject you so they themselves are not rejected. It’s a kind of defense mechanism. So keep that in mind if someone rejects you.



moving it beyond dating

You've been seeing this guy for a while now, and you think he's the one. How can you broach the topic to him? For starters, talk to your partner. Is he ready to make the switch to an exclusive relationship, or is he still interested in casual dating? It's important to make sure you're both on the same page.

You also need to be emotionally prepared for the commitment necessary in building and sustaining a relationship. These things take time, energy and effort. You might have to party less, or explain to your friends your need for couple-time and focus on getting your work done within office hours. Think about whether you're ready for the sacrifices involved.

Lastly, don't force it. If your date isn't ready, pressure is only going to drive him away. Let it take its natural course. And do not announce it to friends, family or public domain prematurely.



Handling fights in a relationship

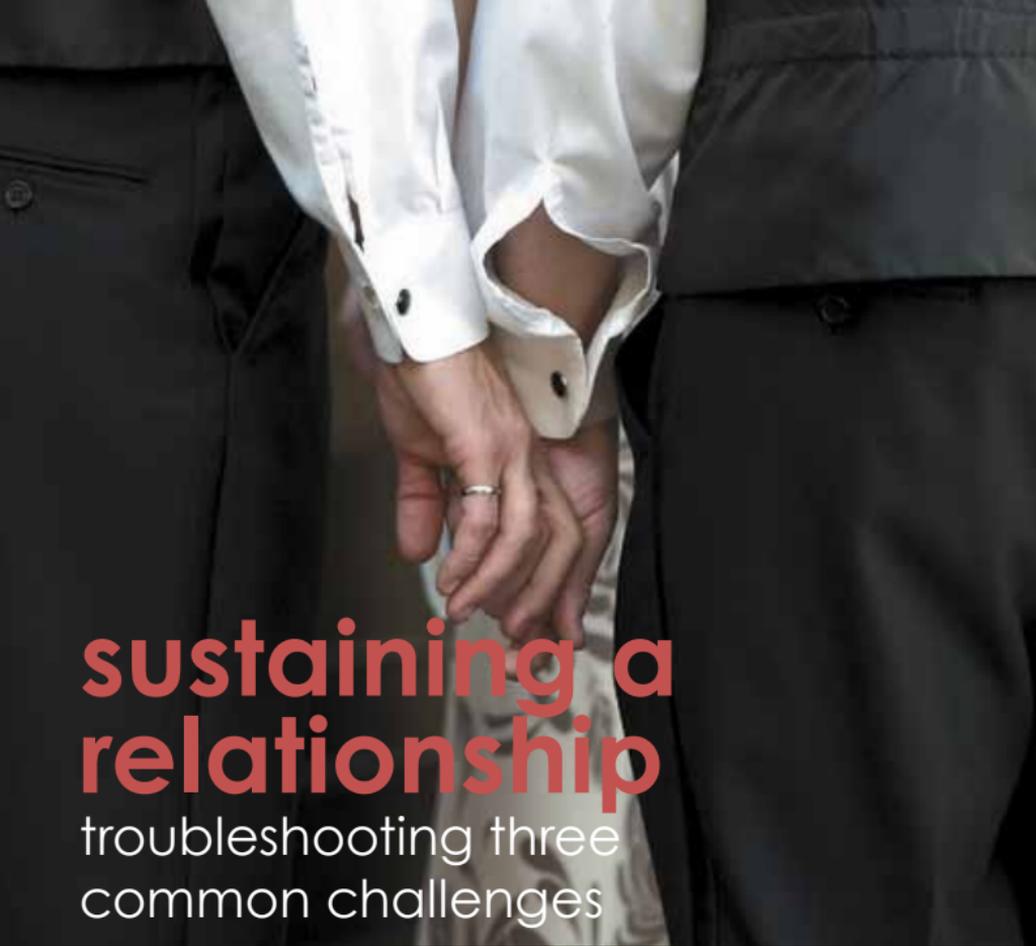
It's absolutely normal for couples to fight. Here's how to navigate the rocky shores of conflict:

Be patient and realistic. Understand that there's no magic rule to resolving conflict, and every relationship has its own quirks.

Take a time-out. If the situation gets too intense, let your partner know that it might be better if you drop the issue for now. Re-visit it when your heads are cooler.

Be assertive and stand up for yourself. But at the same time, don't be hysterical during a disagreement. Let your partner speak, and listen to what he has to say. A calm, two-way conversation will allow both of you to get your points across.

Understand each others' way of communication. You and your partner grew up in different families. How we speak/argue is influenced heavily by our family, so there might be clashes in communication styles. Be aware and develop your exclusive couple communication style.



sustaining a relationship

troubleshooting three
common challenges

Should I tell my family I'm dating a man?

If you haven't come out yet, it's best you do so before introducing your partner to your family. First, you need to have a good grasp of how your family might react. If they've expressed homophobic sentiments in the past, you should resolve this issue before talking about other stuff. Take it slow, and seek professional help if you think you need guidance on coming out.

If you think they're ready, have a talk with your family. Make it clear that you are gay, and that you would like for them to be a part of that aspect of your life. Most parents will want you to be happy in life, even if they're not entirely accepting of your sexuality.

How do I introduce my gay partner to my family?

If you're already out to your family, you might consider taking the next step by introducing your date to them. Including your partner in all aspects of your life sends a powerful message, and may result in greater acceptance of your sexuality from your family.

First, ease your family into it by conducting short trial visits. This could mean bringing your partner home just to say hi. Get him to bring along a small gift, such as your mum's favourite snack, so as to leave a good impression. If things go well, you may increase the duration of the visits gradually, then proceed to bringing him along for family dinners or events. If your family reacts badly, however, you need to stand firm and let them know that you will continue seeing your boyfriend, regardless of their objections. With any luck, your family will get used to his presence in time to come.

I'm attached, but I'm finding myself attracted to my hot neighbour. Help!

Being attracted to someone else while you're dating is perfectly normal. There are many reasons why people in relationships might get involved with another person. You need to examine your feelings to see if your attraction is purely physical, or if there are emotional attachments involved. If it's just sex you're after, has there been a prior agreement about sexual rendezvous outside of the relationship? If you do decide to have sex with another person, always use a condom to protect your partner and yourself.

Sometimes the attraction to another person may be symptomatic of underlying issues in a relationship. Are you trying to punish your partner because of something he did in the past? Are you bored and stuck in a rut? Are you doing this because you think your partner is not the one for you? Have an open discussion with your boyfriend about your feelings toward the "third party". You might also consider seeking professional counselling services to work out these issues together.



languages of love

To keep a relationship going, learn to speak the five languages of love. You and your man may speak in different tongues when it comes to feeling loved.

Quality time You're a quality-time person if you value eye contact, meaningful conversations and shared activities.

Receiving gifts You may enjoy giving and receiving small tokens of love. Flowers, bracelets, a gym membership card: these are symbols of love to you.

Words of affection Sweet nothings are something to you. You thrive on encouragement and compliments.

Physical touch You like hugging, holding hands, kissing and being in physical proximity with your partner. Touching makes you feel loved and connected.

Acts of service You gain pleasure from doing things for your partner, such as washing the dishes after dinner. Chores aren't acts of obligation for you, but a service borne out of love.

What language do you and your partner speak? Find out by asking him directly. In return, tell him what makes you feel special. Speaking in the right language will make your man want to love you back in the way you prefer. Love begets love!

The Internet and various mobile applications facilitating dating have made things a lot easier for gay people to find the right man. But hold the brakes! Don't jump into meeting someone in person before you've done your homework. Take your time to suss out your newfound online friend - if something seems iffy, or if inconsistencies start to appear in the information he provides you, stop chatting.

How to spot if he's faking it?

Does he only have one picture? Insist on multiple video chat sessions and phone conversations before meeting. Do a reverse-searching for his pictures on TinEye to ascertain if they've been lifted from other sites.

Your online date says he needs money?

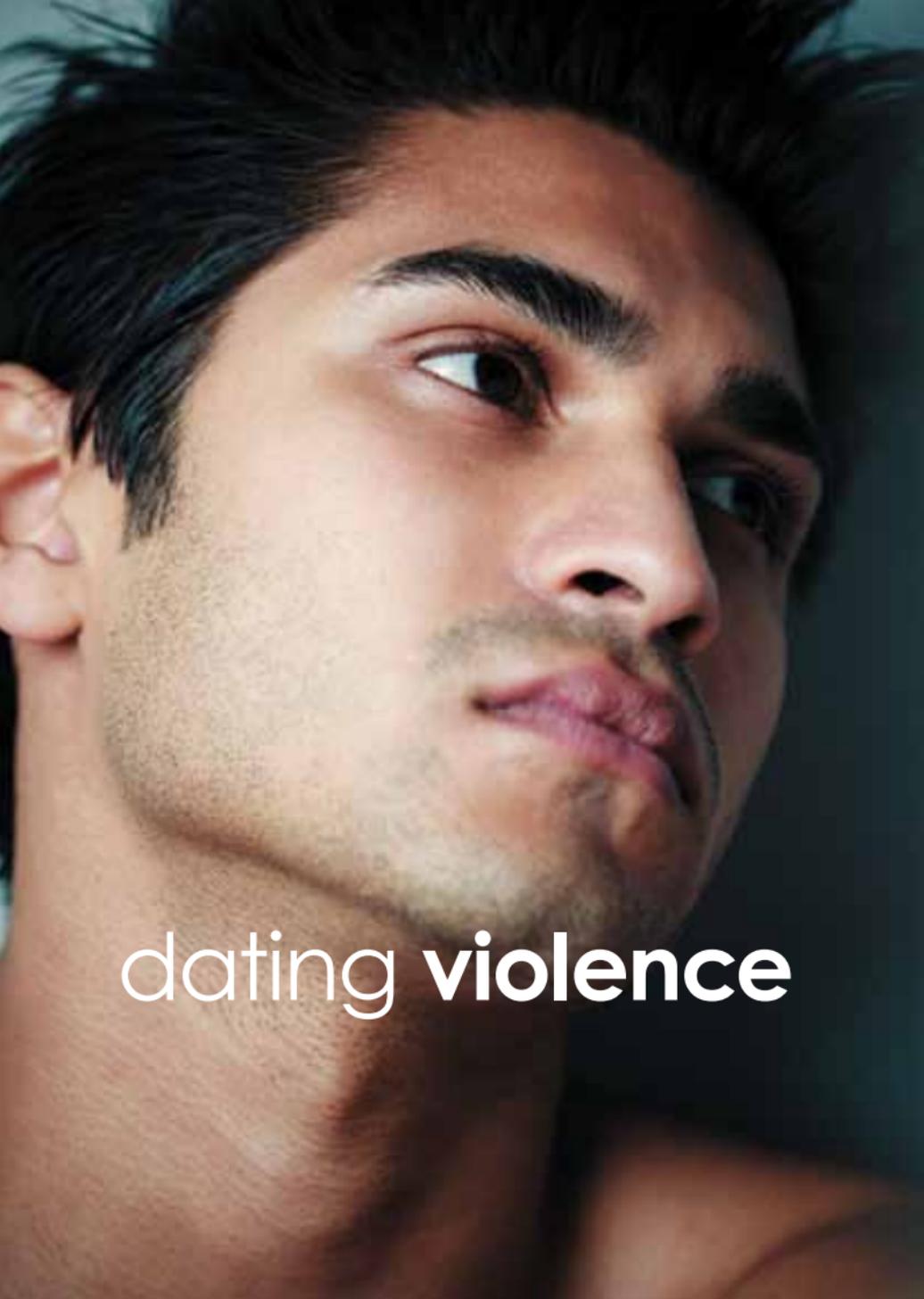
You know something's up if your erstwhile date asks you for an electronic money transfer, or if he starts touting too-good-to-be-true investment opportunities, Viagra and other dodgy requests involving your hard-earned money. Don't get ripped off!

Would you give to a stranger on the street your address?

This sounds intuitive, but it bears repeating that you should never disclose personal information to an online stranger. Be wary if your online date starts pestering you for your address, place of work, or other sensitive information.

safety on
the internet





dating **violence**

So you've decided to meet your potential partner. Here's when your physical safety becomes paramount. To avoid becoming a victim of dating violence, which may involve emotional abuse as well as physical harm, here's a checklist of things to do before you head out of your door

1. Inform a buddy or family member about the location and time of your date. Get them to call you at a predetermined time to check if you're fine. And maybe bail you out of a bad date, too.

2. Always arrange to meet in an open, public place, such as a busy café or restaurant, at least for the first few dates.

3. Decided to meet at a quiet place? Plan how to get away if things get ugly. Do not listen to loud music on your earphones, so that you can hear any movement around you.

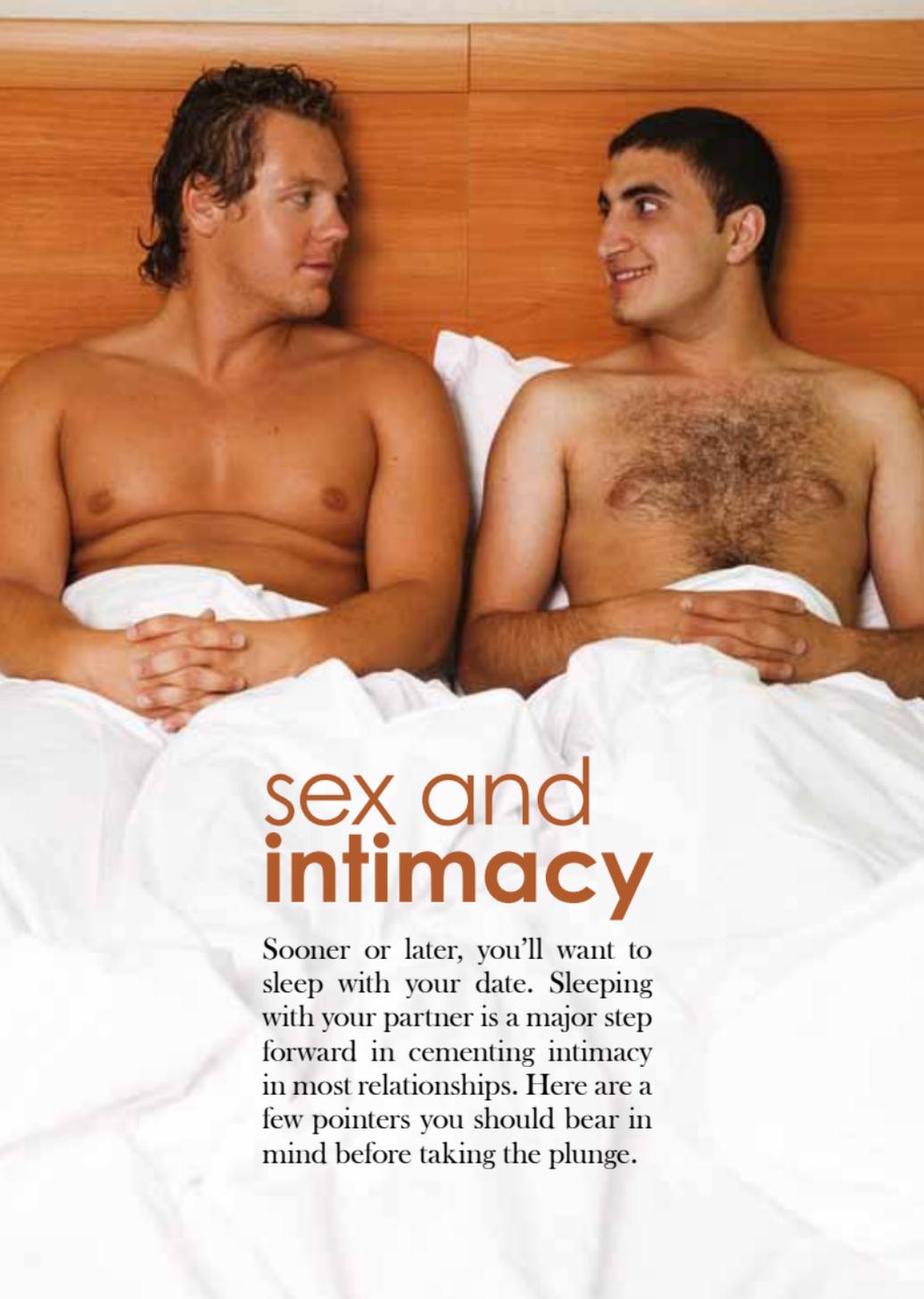
4. Be alert, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Don't drink on a first date or do drugs, as this may affect your judgment and ability to protect yourself.

5. Be assertive. Say no if you're uncomfortable with his sexual advances, and leave if he persists.

6. Having the guy over? Lock your valuables away.

7. Keep a condom at hand, even if you think sex isn't on the agenda. It's always a good thing to have one within easy reach, just in case the date starts to get hot and heavy. You can say NO if he refused to use protection.

8. And no, you do not need to fly to another country the next day just because the guy is hot. Think of your safety when you are alone overseas.



sex and intimacy

Sooner or later, you'll want to sleep with your date. Sleeping with your partner is a major step forward in cementing intimacy in most relationships. Here are a few pointers you should bear in mind before taking the plunge.

When should I get down to it?

Do it when you're ready and comfortable, not because of some fuzzy notion that gay men are supposed to be sex-hungry. Don't feel pressured into having sex — ask yourself if you trust the person. If the answer's yes, go ahead and dim the lights.

Sexual safety

You care for your partner, and you want to protect him. Take responsibility for his safety. And yours. Insist on using a condom, every time.

Using condoms is a sign of lack of trust?

Tell him that using a condom means you care for his well-being. Be frank about your sexual history, then get tested for STIs together. A commitment to sexual safety will only strengthen the bond between the two of you.

What can two guys do in bed?

Plenty. Anal isn't the be-all and end-all of gay sex. Non-penetrative sex, or frottage, is an option: you grind against each other until you reach orgasm. Of course, there's also kissing, foreplay, oral sex... Try role-playing to spice things up. Act out your soldier-meets-doctor fantasy. Whisper dirty things in his ear. Or have sex in the shower, the kitchen, the garden...Just remember to play it safe by using a condom.

But...I'm shy. And it hurts.

Again, your own comfort is paramount. If you're the receiving partner in anal sex, lubrication can help ease the pain. Relax. Practice with sex toys. And remember, you have the power to stop at any time. See a gay-friendly doctor if you experience prolonged pain, bleeding or discomfort.

about HIV & STIs

HIV can be transmitted in these body fluids

- Blood
- Semen / pre-cum
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk

These fluids can be transferred during

- Unprotected penetrative sex (oral, anal and vaginal sex)
- Intravenous drug use (sharing of needles)
- Mother-to-child transmission (pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding)
- Receiving infected blood, blood products, organs, etc.

You cannot be infected by

- Ordinary non-intimate contact, such as shaking hands, hugging, touching, crowds
- Sharing food or drink
- Using swimming pools
- Sitting on toilet seats
- Through insects that bite, such as mosquitoes

Talking about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and other STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) aren't exactly sexy, we know. But it's important that you have the information you need to, quite literally, save your backside. Here are some tricky scenarios you might find yourself in, and what you should do about them:

My partner insisted on "bareback" sex last night. I'm worried now. What should I do? If you've just had unprotected sex, or the condom broke or slipped during sex less than 72 hours ago, check with DSC clinic and see how they can help with Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). Call 62946300 for more details.

It was a romantic evening and I indulged in heavy petting with my date. Will I contract HIV?

Provided you didn't engage in penetrative sex, there's little to no chance of you getting infected, so don't worry. Open-mouthed kissing is considered a very low-risk activity, but do refrain from frenching or oral sex if you or your partner have mouth ulcers. And remember, HIV cannot be transmitted through hugging or holding hands.



Anonymous HIV Test in Singapore

Action For AIDS
Anonymous HIV Testing
DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan
Lane #01-16 S(200031)
Tel: 6254 0212
Tues & Wed: 6.30pm to 8pm
Sat: 1.30pm to 3.30pm
Public holidays: Closed
www.afa.org.sg

Anteh Dispensary
368 Geylang Road S(389381)
Tel: 6744 1809

Cambridge Clinic
333, Kreta Ayer Road,
#03-27 S(080333)
Tel: 6327 1252

Dr Jay Medical Centre
115 Killiney Road S(239553)
Tel: 6235 5196

Dr Soh Family Clinic
966 Jurong West Street 93
#01-219 S(640966)
Tel: 6791 7735

M Lam Clinic
739 Geylang Road S(389649)
Tel: 6748 1949

Robertson Medical
Practice
11 Unity Street #02-07,
Robertson Walk S(237995)
Tel: 6238 7810

I've had unprotected sex. When should I get tested?

Within 3 weeks

Testing **NOT** recommended, unless several previous high risk exposures and no previous HIV testing

After 3 to 4 weeks

Testing recommended, re-testing needed

After 3 months

Testing recommended, re-testing usually not needed

NOTE The HIV test tests for the antibodies that develop in response to the HIV virus which enters the body. It takes 1 to 3 months for the antibodies to develop. If you have regular sex, you should go for regular HIV testing.

I've been told to get tested for HIV "regularly". What exactly does that mean?

Here's a rough guide as to when you should get tested:

- You and your partner should get tested at the start of a relationship.
- Get tested if you or your partner has had unprotected casual sex with strangers.
- If you doubt the fidelity of your partner, get yourself tested just to be sure.
- Touch wood, but if you've been the victim of date rape, please do get tested.

How do I know if I've contracted an STI?

Usually, STIs will manifest themselves in a number of ways. If you notice a burning sensation or pain when you pee, redness or swelling of your penis or balls, or if there is rectal discharge or discharge from your penis, you might have contracted Chlamydia or Gonorrhoea.

Keep in mind that some STIs, such as syphilis, are asymptomatic, which means you might not display any visible symptoms. In general, coming into contact with an infected person's open sores, bodily fluids, penis or ass may cause you to become infected. Screening at regular intervals will give you ease of mind.

Can STIs be cured?

Yes! Bacterial STIs are curable, so treatment is possible.

However, viral infections such as genital herpes are incurable. Antiviral medication can relieve pain during an outbreak by healing sores more quickly, so it is always a good idea to seek treatment early. Visit the DSC Clinic for treatment options.

What should I do?

Getting yourself tested regularly for STIs is a form of responsibility to both your partner and the community. Remember, most STIs are manageable and some are curable. Don't be afraid, just do it!



This booklet's meant to be a primer in the art and science of dating. Here's a quick run-through of what you should take away from all of this: know what you want, be confident, go out there, have fun and be safe.

**Good luck,
guys!**



oogachaga counselling and support

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www.oogachaga.com

contact@oogachaga.com

our services

- face to face counselling
- hotline service 626 86 626
(Tue to Thu 7 to 10pm / Sat 2 to 6pm)
- email counselling
- support groups
- workshops and forums