

Lifestyles

Alone on Valentine's? It's not so bad

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Love is grand. It's a many splendoured thing. And it's enough to drive otherwise stable people over the bend if they happen to be single on St. Valentine's Day.

Sure, it was probably a good idea once, setting aside a day to show that special someone how much they're loved.

But then the flower, candy and card industry got wind of it and left us with just one more holiday where the expectations outstrip the reality.

Especially for singles. "We live in a society in which the expectations for these types of holidays are wildly exaggerated," said Peggy Grall, a counsellor with Kobsa, Grall and Associates. "Being alone may have been okay for the past few months and then it's not all of a sudden."

And it starts young. Flash back to grade school where popularity is measured by the number of valentine cards received. And even the well-adjusted adult can be tempted to hide under the covers until the day of wine and roses dissolves into a new sunrise.

Shopping, eating and drinking too much are popular ways to get over the hump, but they aren't exactly effective, said Ms Grall.

Instead, taking a good look at what's going on is a better option.

"Look at your expectations. What are you allowing this to mean," said Ms Grall. "If we could just stop for a minute and realize this is just marketing anyway."

In other words, keep perspective. February 14 is just a holiday. And not even an important enough one for the government and banks to take off.

"Our life becomes what we focus on. A day is coming and everyone's in love," said Ms Grall. "We can buy into what we think we're supposed to be doing."

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PEGGY GRALL

But it doesn't have to be that way. With society now engaging in a kind of serial monogamy where people drift from one long-term committed relationship to another, being suddenly single is uncommonly common.

"In fact, there's a whole lot of people who don't have someone," said Ms Grall. "This isn't about being a loser because no one loves them."

And there are good reasons for people to be alone by choice.

But even if some cad of a partner dumped his or her sweetheart just days before the monster St. Valentine created, it isn't the end of the world.

"You get to decide how you feel about it," said Ms Grall. "Choose to feel about it the way you choose. Do something special for yourself. Or not. It's up to you."

If self-pampering only feels self-indulgent, share the pain. In other words, get together with similarly situated pals for a singles night out.

But fun may not be on the agenda

for those shattered by a fresh heartache such as divorce, separation or bereavement.

Instead, "spend time with people you know will understand what you're facing," said Ms Grall. "It may just be good friends. Then it's not in your face, everyone else's expectations."

Or decide to focus elsewhere.

"Volunteering, putting yourself in the service of others, is always a good idea," said Ms Grall. "Get yourself invested in someone else. Go and visit an older person, a relative or a friend."

And remember that romance isn't what makes the world go round. Love is.

"Very few people are without anyone who loves them," said Ms Grall. "There are brothers and sisters, children, friends and coworkers. It's a gift to know there are people you love who love you."

And if none of them are around, there are still compassionate people to talk to.

According to Judith Rasenen, executive director of the North Halton Distress Centre, phones don't suddenly ring off the hook as Valentine's Day approaches. But the sad may feel more sad.

"Those who are already lonely do mention it," she said. "And they call a



little more often."


Another thing to keep in mind is that Valentine's Day isn't always a bed of roses for couples, either. The pressure can fold the unwary like a cheap tent.

"What do you expect? Will this make or break your relationship if they don't buy you flowers," asked Ms Grall.

Instead, couples should look at subtle ways to celebrate the annual day of love. "I would check with your mate and ask that question. Valentine's Day is coming up, how would you like to celebrate it. It could be give me a back rub, or rent a chick movie. Highlight it

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