

I was the first blind date between Sally and Trent (not their real names). They had been set up by a well-meaning friend and he was picking her up at 7pm for dinner. After they awkwardly shook hands on the front doorstep he took her to Victoria Street, Richmond for a cheap and cheerful Vietnamese dinner. "He started off by saying that we could share two entrees and if we were still hungry we could order more," says Sally, cringing. "I've got to say, the Vietnamese wasn't a great first impression ... It's not that there's anything wrong with the food, but laminex tables and a meal that comes to \$15 doesn't really knock your socks off, does it?" When the bill arrived, Trent said that he would pick up the tab for dinner and she could pay for bowling afterwards. "He took me to Victoria Gardens and played about eight games of ten-pin bowling which came to about \$100, which I ended up paying for. I hate ten-pin bowling - I was so bored. It was the worst date ever."

The last census in Australia recorded the lowest marriage rate since 1978. It also reported that more people are single or living alone in every state and territory than ever before. That means there are more people kicking around on the dating scene. But even though we're staying single for longer, it doesn't necessarily mean we're getting any better at the dating game. There are still more horror date stories out there than you can poke a stick at.

Often a date is something that has been built up in people's minds, and there's a lot of pressure on the situation. It's this pressure that causes people to act out of sorts and this is when disaster strikes. Psychologist Meredith Fuller says it's important not to place too much importance on the first date. "Just go out and enjoy yourself," she advises. "Try to remember that you are not scrutinizing for your life partner on your first date. And always remember to be yourself - don't try and be someone you're not."

Graphic artist Mark Buggy tells the story of his friend who slipped up when he tried to impress a girl on a first date. His mate had returned to a girl's house after a first date and was introduced to her cat. "He picked the cat up and gave it a big hug. He was trying to impress her by showing his sensitive/affectionate side. Problem was he hugged the cat way too hard and it relieved itself all over his shirt."

Fuller says it's important to go into a date with the right attitude. "The best way to approach the situation is lightly," she says. "To take the pressure off it's often best to make the first date something short like coffee or brunch. That way if things are going really terribly and you are having a bit of a panic attack you can keep telling yourself that the torture will be over quickly and you can scurry off home."

According to Fuller there are a few simple tips for those seeking success in the dating game. "You should definitely avoid talking about your exes and negative things like job stress or your resentments. It's also important not to hog the talking space - ask the other person plenty of questions about themselves so you can find out the things you have in common."

"The other thing people need to remember is that one date is rarely enough. Try not to make snap judgements about the person - have a second meeting before you decide anything for sure. You'd be amazed how you'll then make a more informed and good decision."

It's also important to remember that bad dates happen to all of us, and not to take it personally. Even rock stars have tales of horror dates. Alice Cooper relates his outing with Linda Blair to see *The Exorcist*: "It was sort of like the Addams Family going to the movies," he recalls.

Channel Ten's James Matheson cringes as he reflects on a date he went on years ago. "I took a girl to the movies once and was wearing a pale blue shirt. I was so nervous through the whole thing that when we came out and headed to dinner I had the most ridiculously large sweat patches under my arms. It looked like I had just gotten out of a step aerobics class," he says.

Luckily, Fuller believes it's possible to recover from even the most nightmareish dates. "If it goes horribly wrong, remember that humour is your greatest asset," she advises. "If you cannot think of something witty or amusing to say, simply smile and laugh about how much easier the second time will be. Whether one of you has been embarrassed or shamed, good-natured laughter and a warm attitude can deflect tension."

"If you go home crying, angry, disillusioned or humiliated, just call a friend and blurt it out. Have a good cry or laugh and imagine what a fabulous dinner party anecdote it will make in a few months or years. And remind yourself what the other person has missed out on - you."



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How to impress

1. Don't talk about your ex
 2. If you invited the person
 3. Don't show up late. If you're going
 4. Don't forget to compliment the other
 5. Ask the other person about interests
 6. Don't obviously eye other men/women
 7. Don't grill your companion about their life
 8. Don't answer your mobile at dinner
 9. Don't be too flashy with money or gifts
 10. Don't get too intense about politics
- Source: www.date.info