

# 5 STEPS TO FLIRTING WITH ANYONE

Approaching, attracting and alluring others may not come naturally to you, but it's a skill you can learn, says **Jean Smith**

*Photographs by Adrian Green*

**ARE YOU A NATURAL FLIRT?** Chances are, your immediate response will be no. Flirting is seen as a mysterious, natural talent, and those who are less confident of their skills often label it frivolous or insincere. And yet we all flirt, all the time, with everyone from potential partners to work colleagues. Improving our skills can increase our confidence, attract new people and change the way others see us.

## 1 BE SELECTIVE

One of the greatest flirting myths is the belief that you have to play 'hard to get'. The idea is that the more aloof, unavailable and in demand we seem, the more attractive and interesting we will be. But studies have proved otherwise. In one, college men asked five women on a date. Those women who were deemed 'easy to get' and responded positively to the date were rated more favourably than those deemed 'hard to get', who acted as if they had other dates. But the cases that produced the best responses

were those in which the date seemed easy for the man in question to get, but difficult for everyone else. Recent speed dating studies have confirmed that the more selective you are, the more successful you will be. Researchers at Northwestern University found that the more daters kept their options open, the less attractive they were; they made people feel less special and less noticed. The key: don't make yourself available to everyone; instead, pick your flirting targets and engage fully with them.

## 2 MAKE YOUR MESSAGE CLEAR

We usually overestimate how obvious our verbal and non-verbal signals are. In most cultures, women communicate more subtly than men. Fifty-seven per cent of British women feel they can tell when someone is flirting with them; only 35 per cent of men know when they're the object of attention. Clear, welcoming signals – eye contact, a warm smile, a friendly demeanour – are far more successful than eyelash batting or hair twirling. Most men, on first meeting a woman, choose those they believe are least likely to reject them. Fear of rejection is the single biggest deterrent to flirting.

### 3 REVEAL A LITTLE

We're often told that focusing on the other person when flirting is the key to success. To a certain extent, this is true – after all, it's very flattering to feel that you are the centre of attention. However, focusing exclusively on the other person can backfire if they feel under intense scrutiny, and you also risk looking like you have little to say for yourself. It's important to strike a balance between asking questions and revealing information about yourself. In a review of studies on self-disclosure, US psychologists Nancy Collins and Lynn Carol Miller found that we prefer people who give us personal glimpses into their lives – and, equally, we like people to whom we have opened up about ourselves. Sharing stories, rather than interrogating new acquaintances, increases the bond between people.

### 4 CREATE AN EXPERIENCE

'Sharing an experience – especially if it's unusual or funny – helps us to feel closer,' says Seven Suphi, a motivational coach and author of *More Than Men And Makeup*. Engage in some subtle memory building. Make small-talk about the event you're at. Ask for the other person's opinion on the food or the music, or ask them what they have most enjoyed about the evening. Discussing the things and people around you gives you the opportunity to find common ground or form a mutual opinion. And if the event itself isn't particularly memorable, then it's up to you to make it so. 'Natural flirts often drive the action at a party – they'll invite others to join in whatever they're doing, even if it's just a drinks run,' says Suphi.



#### RESOURCES

● **Jean Smith** is a cultural anthropologist and a media commentator on social behaviour. She also runs flirting seminars in London: [www.allureseminars.com](http://www.allureseminars.com)

### 5 DON'T BE AFRAID TO TEASE

Teasing can feel like a risky strategy, and it certainly has potential to backfire. Still, research has shown that men in particular interpret it as a sign of sexual interest. Not only does teasing allow you to share a joke, it is a sign of intimacy, and shows the recipient that you appreciate him despite, or perhaps because

of, his flaw. For men, it seems, teasing or playful behaviour can also create a frisson of excitement, as they don't always know how to interpret the message. Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner, who conducted a study into teasing, says it is the ambiguity of the message that is sexually suggestive.