

Singled out for special scrutiny

Many people labour under the pre-conception that life's work is all about finding the "right" partner. And this is often the view of the family and friends of the single person.

This kind of thinking usually springs from the most loving of motives: to see someone we care about, or ourselves, "settle down" and be happy.

The dilemma lies in the fact that settling down permanently with a partner and being happy is not something that responds to being forced. And it's not an automatic equation.

Meeting a partner is as much about how we meet ourselves as it is about connecting with the other.

You need to know what you like and don't like: distinguishing between what you were taught you should like and what you've learned actually touches your heart is a lifelong tug of war.

Several questions arise in our minds. How do you dust off the mud and heal the wound of past relationships? How do you prepare yourself and bolster your courage for the next round?

How do you suppress the urge to hurry as the clock keeps ticking and the body gradually sags and softens, and still you are single?

How do you ward off the ache of loneliness without appearing desperate?

How do you make it through the golden gate of coupledness?

If only dealing with the clamour that exists inside our heads and hearts were all we had to cope with, life would be simple.

We live not alone, even if we are single. We exist in society and we are buffeted by the tides that run very strong when survival is deemed at risk.

Society's emphasis on having an intimate partnership means the pressure on singles to conform is unrelenting. This pressure is demonstrated through words and comments, odd silences and concerned glances from family and friends.

Dealing with this becomes a Herculean task as we try to balance the contradictory demands of work, friends and family. How do you meet all these demands, find a partner and stay sane?

Single people approach this task from many angles. Some remove themselves from the fray, wrap themselves in many activities and social networks and avoid the risk of exposure, saying: "I don't need a relationship".

Others leap from the frying pan into the fire and establish exclusive relationships that cloister them from the world. They run the risk of finding that the holy grail of intimacy is not all-fulfilling and that some needs can be met only by a wider group of friends.

In society's eyes, being single can be seen as a problem, but lots of people *are* single, and are quite comfortable remaining so.

For some people, being on your own, doing what you want to do when you want to do it amounts to rather desirable freedom.

So being single is not necessarily a walk in the park. It's easy for our families and friends and society's billboards to dispense advice on what we "need". Even sorting out our own inner

turmoil can be a torturous experience. In all of this we might just want to have someone we can love and who makes us happy. A big ask, and the search for perfection just makes it that much harder.

Survival tips

- **Get to know yourself, and be confident about who you are**
- **Explore all the possibilities of your life, not just the romantic ones**
- **Realise that your life is unique, and don't be pressured to follow someone else's expectations.**