



Guide to Defining the Relationship (DTR)

This guide explores when and how to have the important conversation about defining your relationship (DTR) with someone you're dating. It covers when it's a good time to DTR, when to avoid it, how to prepare for the conversation, and a template for initiating the discussion.



by Julie & Yue from Dateable



But first, what does it mean to define the relationship?

For some, it's the most exciting conversation in a budding relationship, while for others, it's a source of anxiety. Defining the relationship (DTR) means different things to different people because everyone has unique ideas of what a relationship should look like. But ultimately, we all just want to be on the same page with our partner.

For some, it might mean confirming exclusivity—are we officially "dating," or is this something casual? Defining the relationship is a way to clarify the status and direction of your relationship. Having this convo (or a series of conversations) is important to make sure you're both aligned on your intentions, commitment levels, and relationship goals.

So, why is having the DTR talk so hard? The fear of rejection or coming off as too eager keeps many people from initiating the conversation. But here's the truth: waiting for the other person to bring it up only creates uncertainty.

So you're in the right place! We're here to give you the tools you need so you can have an effective talk to understand both of your relationship goals, needs, and desires – and how you can proceed with the relationship after learning this vital information. Ultimately, defining the relationship helps remove ambiguity and ensures that both people feel secure and clear about where things stand. It's a step toward building trust, fostering communication, and avoiding misunderstandings.

Whatever happens, go you! 🙌🙌🙌 You're taking control of your love life and that's the key to ultimately finding the right relationship.

To DTR or not?

People tend to define the relationship when they're ready for a deeper commitment. There are no hard-and-fast rules for when to have the convo.

Time to DTR

- You feel like you're already on a path to building a relationship.
- You're both invested in one another and things are going well.
- You are confident you want to pursue a relationship with this person.
- You're ready to progress everything forward (more time, meeting friends/family, deleting apps).
- You see future potential with this person and are excited to see where things go!

NOT time to DTR

- You're feeling anxious about where the relationship is headed.
- You don't trust the person you're dating and think this is a way to lock them down.
- You think a commitment will make all the red flags go away.
- You want to force a decision or an ultimatum.
- You want to "punish" the person you're dating after being triggered by something they did.

♥ If you're finding more reasons on the left side of this list, then it may be time to have the DTR conversation.

✗ If you're finding more reasons on the right side of this list, then it may be time to press pause and starting communicating your needs

5 Questions to Ask Yourself:

Defining the relationship means different things for different people, so be clear on your ask. Before going into the conversation, think about the following questions:

1. What does a “commitment” mean to you?

Defining the relationship (DTR) requires open communication about exclusivity, boundaries, and expectations. Does it mean full exclusivity? Delete apps? Can you still see other people? Before the talk, reflect on your own needs and prepare mentally.

2. Are labels important to you? Why?

One key aspect is how you want to refer to one another - when friends or family ask what you are, what would you say? It's important to have an open and honest dialogue to ensure you're on the same page about the relationship status.

3. How involved do you want your partner to be in your life?

When defining the relationship, discuss your vision for the partnership - communication, time together, and social circles. Explore how much quality time you both want. Some couples prefer to maintain a lot of independence, while others thrive on more frequent togetherness. Finding the right balance that works for both of you is crucial.

4. What do you look forward to doing with your partner if you DTR?

What other experiences and milestones are important to you that come with defining the relationship? For example, meeting each other's friends and family or going on a trip together. Would you still do these things if you don't DTR or are these dependent on defining your situation?

5. What is something you'd like to work on together as a couple?

Think about what factors are most important to you in a relationship. Do you want better communication and conflict management? Are you looking to increase your emotional intimacy and vulnerability to one another? The process of defining the relationship provides an opportunity to have an open dialogue about what matters most to each of you. By aligning on your relationship needs and expectations, you can work towards building a fulfilling partnership that stands the test of time.

Do's and Don't When Having the Convo

When do you DTR (define the relationship) and move to a more official stage? If you're finding more reasons on the left side of this list, then it may be time to have the DTR conversation.

1 DO have the right intentions

Communicate how you're feeling and what you want. Be most important, you're also open to hearing your partner's perspective.

3 DO talk when you're sober

If you're under the influence, you may not be clear headed enough to communicate what you're looking for.

5 DO lead the convo

Rather than asking, "What are we?" or "Where is this going?", share your vision for the relationship and ask how they feel about it.

7 DO keep it positive and light!

You're not solving climate change here. This should be exciting because you're trying to see if this thing could go somewhere!

9 DO listen

Really hear what they are saying and ask clarifying questions when needed. The goal is to ensure you're on the same page

2 DON'T make it a big deal

There's no need to position it as "we need to talk." Instead, casually bring it up as a "check-in."

4 DON'T make demands

Nobody wants to be backed into a corner. Also a good relationship is built on open communication, not a one way street.

6 DON'T make it vague

Be clear about what you want and the needs you have for a committed relationship. This will make it easier for you to see if you're aligned.

8 DON'T force something

If you aren't getting the response you wanted, make sure to take this information at face value. With this you can decide if you give them more time or move on to someone more aligned with your relationship vision.

10 DON'T get discouraged

It's good to have this conversation, even if you aren't on the same page right away. The DTR talk doesn't have to be one big discussion - continuing to talk about it is a positive sign, even if they aren't ready to commit yet.

Template for Starting the DTR Conversation

So how do you go about having the talk? Here's our tried and true template for starting the conversation:

1

Start Positive

Start with something positive that you really enjoy about this person. "I've really enjoyed spending time with you." "The times we've gone out have been so fun...." "I really like getting to know you..."

2

Name something that this person does that truly makes you happy

"It really makes me happy to meet your friends. It gives me a glimpse into your world." Bring it back to your ask: "I would love to explore our connection more. Can I tell you what I have in mind?" or "I truly see us headed into something more. Can I share what I'm thinking?"

3

Get Consent

After you get your partner's consent, it is time to lay out what you see as an ideal next step.

4

Express Your Desires

Choose the ONE THING that's most important for you and lead with that.

1. I would be thrilled to explore an exclusive partnership with you. I don't want to see other people anymore, and I am ready to delete the apps. What do you think?
2. With my cousin's wedding approaching, I would love to take you as my official +1 and introduce you as my partner. What do you think?
3. It would be great to take a vacation as a couple. Because that's how I view us, we're a couple. What do you think about that idea?

Understanding the Outcome



Green Light:

Ideally you're met with enthusiasm and mutual agreement that they want the same things as you. Yay! This could be the start of something great. Go back to the initial questions you asked yourself and have these conversations with your partner to establish the foundations for your relationship.

Yellow Light:

Even if it's not 100% buy-in, if they're willing to work towards the same things then it's still a positive interaction. Maybe the person you're seeing says, "I've really enjoyed spending time with you, and I see this going somewhere, too. I'm just not ready to meet your family yet, but I want to work on getting there." The DTR doesn't have to be one big do-or-die conversation but rather a series of conversations that better help understand whether you're on the same page.

Red Light:

If they shut down the conversations or outright say they don't want a relationship, you know it's not worth further investing in.

If they decide they don't want to be in a relationship...it often doesn't have to do with you.

Here are some common reasons people are commitment resistant:

1 Past Experiences

Fear of repeating past mistakes or emotional baggage from previous relationships can make someone hesitant to fully invest in a new commitment.

2 Personal Readiness

Some people may not feel ready for a committed relationship due to personal circumstances, career focus, or a desire for independence. They might have unclear goals or be focusing on personal growth.

3 Emotional Barriers

Trust issues from past betrayals or a fear of vulnerability can make it difficult for someone to open up and commit to a new relationship.

4 Relationship Values

They may have different views on relationships, such as valuing independence or having different expectations about commitment. Some might find situationships fulfilling or sufficient for their current needs.

Ultimately, their reason doesn't matter though. Be proud you had the courage to ask for what you want in a relationship and put yourself out there! This is how you will grow your emotional maturity and relationship readiness.

It's only a matter of when – not if –you'll find someone who can't wait to be in a relationship with you. Keep that as your focus, not why they weren't ready for more.



You got this!

Defining the relationship is a brave and empowering step. While it can feel daunting, it's a chance to bring clarity and connection into your love life. By starting the conversation, you're valuing yourself and your partner.

Don't fear the outcome—whether it strengthens your relationship or provides clarity to move another direction, it's always a win. You deserve a love built on honesty and mutual understanding, so take the leap. Trust yourself and remember: you're in control of your love life! Whatever happens, you're in the driver's seat, and not just a captive passenger, along for someone else's agenda. 🙌

Need more help? Schedule a 1:1 call with us

Special Offer: ~~\$200~~ \$150 for a 30 minute clarity call

We don't offer this to everyone, but we'd like to extend the opportunity to chat more about your situation with those who took the first step with the guide. In 30 minutes, we believe we can give you clarity, perspective, and coach you through anything you need.

<https://www.findingyourperson.com/offers/2Z3nySLt>