THE SOUL CHECK DATING SYSTEM™ | COMPANION GUIDE

FIRST DATE CONVERSATION GUIDE

What to Ask, What to Listen For & What to Trust

Your Soul Check toolkit for the most important 90 minutes in dating.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

RED FLAG SIGNALS

SOUL CHECK PROMPTS

20 PAGES
COMPLETE GUIDE

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WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE

This guide is organized around the actual arc of a first date — from the moment you pull into the parking lot to the two-hour check-in when you get home. Work through it in order the first time; after that, flip to the sections you need most.

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> ***You don't need to be completely healed to date wisely. You just need to be more loyal to your own signals than to your loneliness.***

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01 | BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

The 10 minutes before you walk through the door are just as important as the date itself. This is when you set your intention, quiet the noise of everyone else's opinions, and remind yourself of a truth your younger self didn't yet know:

You are not auditioning. You are evaluating.

YOUR PRE-DATE INTENTION RESET (5 MINUTES BEFORE)

- My goal today is to gather information, not to earn approval.
- I am a whole, complete, valuable woman — with or without a relationship.
- I will stay curious about him instead of performing for him.
- I give myself full permission to feel whatever I feel — and to trust it.
- One date proves nothing. I can like him AND still watch closely.
- I am allowed to leave, decline a second date, or say no at any point.

WHAT TO NOTICE IN THE FIRST 90 SECONDS

Before a single word is exchanged, your body has already started collecting data. Pay attention to your physical response in the moment you first see him.

- Does he greet you with warmth and full attention, or is he scattered or distracted?
- Does your breathing stay easy, or did you just hold your breath without realizing it?
- Does your chest feel open and relaxed, or is there a subtle tightening?
- Does your body want to move toward him — or does it want to keep a little distance?

These signals are not nerves — or not only nerves. Your body wisdom has already run his face, his energy, and his presence through a lifetime of data. Honor what comes up.

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02 | OPENING WARMLY: THE FIRST 15 MINUTES

These questions feel light and conversational — but every one of them is designed to open a window into who he actually is. You don't need to ask all eight. Pick three or four that feel natural, and let the conversation lead.

The two-column format: the left column shows the question; the right column shows what a healthy vs. concerning answer sounds like. Read the right column before your date — not during.

Q: "What did the rest of your week look like after we made plans?"	**Listen for:** Reveals organization, whether he has a full life, and how naturally he shares day-to-day details. Healthy men mention people, activities, work — not just logistics.
Q: "How long have you lived in this area — is this home for you?"	**Listen for:** Opens up backstory: roots, family, relocation for work or divorce, connection to community. RED FLAG: no real answer, deflects to complimenting you immediately.
Q: "What do you do to decompress after a long or difficult day?"	**Listen for:** Reveals coping patterns. GREEN FLAG: reads, walks, calls a friend, cooks, prays. RED FLAG: drinks, TV alone every night, "I don't really deal with stress well."
Q: "What are you most looking forward to this fall / this summer?"	**Listen for:** Enthusiasm for life is data. Someone who can't name a single thing to look forward to may be depressed, checked out, or emotionally flat.

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02 | OPENING WARMLY (CONTINUED)

Q: "How did you and your kids / grandkids spend time together recently? (if applicable)"	**Listen for:** Watch his face and vocal tone as much as his words. Genuine love is unmistakable. Obligation or irritation is also unmistakable.
Q: "What kind of work do you do — and is it something you enjoy?"	**Listen for:** Not about salary. About self-awareness and relationship to purpose. Endless complaining about work early in conversation reveals character quickly.
Q: "Have you always lived in this area, or are you from somewhere else originally?"	**Listen for:** Great backstory opener. Reveals upbringing, family ties, and gives him a chance to share formative experiences in a low-pressure way.
Q: "What kinds of things do you do to stay active or take care of yourself?"	**Listen for:** Reveals self-awareness about health, discipline, and body image. Relevant at this stage of life — you want a partner who takes his health seriously.

> ***A great first date feels like a good conversation — not an interview. But make no mistake: you are gathering information the entire time.***

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03 | GOING DEEPER: MID-DATE QUESTIONS

Once the conversation has found its rhythm — usually 20–30 minutes in — these questions invite him to show you his emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and the texture of his inner life. Questions marked with ■ have particularly high red flag potential. Pay close attention.

Q: "What do you think you learned most from your marriage, or your longest relationship?"	**Listen for:** The single most revealing question on this list. Self-reflection vs. blame tells you everything. "We grew apart" is healthy. "She was impossible" is data.
Q: "Tell me about someone in your life — friend, sibling, colleague — you really admire."	**Listen for:** Reveals his capacity for genuine respect, gratitude, and warmth toward others. Empty answers are data. Be curious about WHO he chooses.
Q: "What does a really good week look like for you right now?"	**Listen for:** Reveals values: family, faith, fitness, work, friendships. Does his life sound like one you could enter — or one that's already full in a way that won't make room for you?
Q: "Are you close with your children? What does that look like day to day?"	**Listen for:** Watch tone. Does he light up? Does he sound burdened? Distant fathers rarely become present partners. Men who are close to their kids tend to have more emotional depth.
Q: "What's your relationship like with your siblings / family of origin? (if comfortable)"	**Listen for:** Family dynamics often predict relationship patterns. Closeness, estrangement, conflict styles — all relevant. Don't push; just listen to what he volunteers.

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03 | GOING DEEPER (CONTINUED)

Q: "What are you hoping a relationship looks like at this stage of your life?"	**Listen for:** He should be able to answer this honestly and specifically. Vague or flattering answers ("I just want someone to make me smile") deserve follow-up.
Q: "Have you dated since your marriage ended? What has that been like for you?"	**Listen for:** Reveals emotional readiness. "I dated a few people but realized I wasn't ready" = honest and self-aware. "I've been on the apps constantly" = still searching for something.
Q: "What role does faith or spirituality play in your life, if any?"	**Listen for:** Values alignment matters at this stage. This doesn't need to match perfectly — but you need to know where he stands, especially if faith is central to your life.
Q: "What does friendship look like in your life — do you have good friends?"	**Listen for:** Men without close friendships often turn to partners to meet all their emotional needs. A man with good friendships is usually more emotionally available, not less.
Q: "Is there anything you're working on or hoping to grow in right now?"	**Listen for:** Self-aware men are working on something — always. No answer at all can indicate emotional flatness. A genuine answer reveals character and growth mindset.

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04 | THE BOLD QUESTIONS: WHAT MATURE WOMEN CAN ASK

At this stage of life, you don't have to wait for the third date or the fifth month to ask the questions that actually matter. You've earned the right to be direct. These questions feel bold — but they're entirely appropriate between two adults who are serious about finding the right fit.

Q: "Are you actually ready for a real relationship, or are you still figuring out what you want?"	**Listen for:** This gives him permission to be honest. A man who says "I'm not sure" is being truthful and doing you a favor. Thank him and trust it.
Q: "How did your marriage really end? What's the honest version?"	**Listen for:** Appropriate after he's already shared some context. Listen for consistency with earlier answers. A story that shifts or has no accountability is a flag.
Q: "Do you have any ongoing health issues I should know about early on?"	**Listen for:** Completely legitimate at this age. You're not being invasive — you're being practical. His comfort level with the question tells you something too.
Q: "What does your financial picture look like — are you stable?"	**Listen for:** You don't need his net worth. You need to know there aren't hidden catastrophes. Discomfort, deflection, or sudden vagueness here is significant information.
Q: "Do you have any concerns about the age difference / the stage I'm at? (if relevant)"	**Listen for:** Proactive honesty opens real conversation. A man who has thought this through and can discuss it openly is more trustworthy than one who waves it away.
Q: "What would your closest friend say is the one thing you're still working on as a person?"	**Listen for:** Asks for self-knowledge without asking directly. A man who can answer this genuinely — and with some humor — has real self-awareness.

> You are not being too much. You are being appropriately discerning. The right man will respect these questions — or at least res

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05 | IN-THE-MOMENT SOUL CHECK PROMPTS

The Soul Check isn't something you do after the date. It's something you do **during** it — quietly, internally, while the conversation continues. Your body is processing him in real time. You just have to stop ignoring the report.

THE 30-SECOND SOUL CHECK PROTOCOL™

Run this check 3–4 times during the date: when you first sit down, midway through, when the conversation gets more personal, and just before you leave.

BREATH + BODY CHECK

- Am I breathing easily right now?
- Is my chest open or tightening?
- Are my shoulders relaxed?
- Does my stomach feel settled?
- Am I holding tension anywhere?
- Is my jaw tight?

ENERGY + SPIRIT CHECK

- Do I feel energized or slightly drained?
- Am I curious about him, or anxious?
- Am I being myself — or a careful version?
- Is there a check in my spirit right now?
- Would I want another hour here?
- Does this feel easy or effortful?

THE "CHECK IN YOUR SPIRIT" MOMENT

Many women of faith have a language for this: that moment when something doesn't feel right in your spirit, even when you can't articulate exactly why. This is the same intuitive knowing — and it is remarkably accurate.

"How does my body feel right now?"
Pause and actually check. Not "How do I think I feel?" — How does your body feel?

"Am I at peace in my spirit with this person?"
Peace doesn't mean calm. It means your nervous system feels fundamentally safe.

"Is my energy flowing naturally, or am I working to maintain it?"
Healthy connection feels easy. Performing for someone else is exhausting — and it's a signal.

> ***Your body wisdom doesn't lie. It processes more information in 30 seconds than your rational mind can analyze in 30 minutes. Trust the report.***

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06 | RED FLAGS IN REAL TIME

These aren't the dramatic red flags from a bad movie. These are the subtle, real-world signals that appear on first dates all the time — and that women who've been through difficult marriages are often trained to explain away. **Don't.**

■ **He speaks about his ex with ongoing bitterness or contempt**	No self-reflection means the same patterns will repeat — with you as the new target.
■ **He dominates the conversation and asks you almost nothing about yourself**	Not looking for a partner. Looking for an audience. This dynamic will not improve.
■ **His stories about his past keep shifting or don't quite add up**	Inconsistency is almost always hiding something. Your gut noticed before your brain did.
■ **He orders or consumes more alcohol than you're comfortable with**	This is not his best behavior under pressure. This is his normal. Believe it.
■ **He makes "jokes" at your expense or that feel slightly dismissive**	Contempt always starts small. Trust the sting — it's real and it's a preview.
■ **He pushes for more personal information than feels comfortable**	Boundary-testing starts on Date One. Notice whether he respects your pace.
■ **He is rude, impatient, or dismissive toward the server or barista**	The Coffee Shop Test: he is showing you who he actually is when the stakes feel low.
■ **He is distracted by his phone or keeps scanning the room**	You have his maximum effort right now. This is him trying. File that away.
■ **He love-bombs you — excessive compliments, intense immediate connection**	Feels good. Is designed to feel good. Real connection develops over time, not one coffee.

One clear demonstration of disrespectful behavior is enough information to make a decision. You do not owe anyone a second chance t

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07 | GREEN FLAGS WORTH NOTICING

After difficult marriages, many women become excellent at spotting red flags — and lose touch with what genuine compatibility actually feels like. Healthy connection has its own signals. Learn to recognize these just as quickly.

✓ He asks you thoughtful follow-up questions about what you share	Real interest looks like this. He's not waiting for his turn to talk — he's genuinely curious about you.
✓ He speaks warmly and specifically about the people in his life	Emotional warmth isn't performed — you can feel it. The texture of how he describes others tells you how he'll describe you.
✓ He's kind and patient with service staff	He is showing you who he really is when nothing is at stake. This is character, not charm.
✓ He speaks honestly about his past without blame or performance	"We wanted different things" or "I wasn't showing up the way I should have" lands very differently than bitterness.
✓ He can laugh at himself	Secure men are self-deprecating without fishing for reassurance. This is emotional health on display.
✓ He respects your conversational pace — doesn't push, pressure, or redirect	He meets you where you are. He's not trying to manage the impression you have of him.
✓ After 30 minutes, you realize you haven't checked your phone once	Good conversation is magnetic. When it flows without effort, notice. This is meaningful.
✓ He is consistent — what he says matches how he acts, even in small moments	Consistency is the highest character indicator. It cannot be faked for long.
✓ You feel like yourself — not a better version or a careful version. Just you.	This is the most important green flag of all. The right person makes you feel more like yourself, not less.

> ***Good men feel easy. Not boring — easy. There is a difference, and your nervous system knows it.***

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08 | NAVIGATING TRICKY MOMENTS

First dates have moments that catch you off guard. A question you don't want to answer. A comment that doesn't land well. A feeling you can't quite name. Here's how to navigate the most common first-date situations with grace — and with your standards intact.

SCENARIO: He asks very personal questions too soon

OLD RESPONSE:
I'd rather not share that yet, but I'll give you anything you want if you just ask.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
"I like to let things unfold a little more naturally — but I appreciate your curiosity!"

SCENARIO: He asks why you got divorced

OLD RESPONSE:
Launching into the full marriage story, validating his curiosity without a boundary.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
"It took me a while to get clarity on it. I'd rather talk about what I'm looking for now."

SCENARIO: He says something mildly dismissive or sarcastic

OLD RESPONSE:
Laughing it off, making a mental note, and deciding he was probably just nervous.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
"I'm not sure I love that framing — can you say what you mean more directly?"

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08 | NAVIGATING TRICKY MOMENTS (CONTINUED)

SCENARIO: He pushes for a second date before the first one is over

OLD RESPONSE:
Agreeing immediately to avoid awkwardness, then feeling locked in.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
"Let's see how the rest of today goes — I like to take things one step at a time."

SCENARIO: He mentions his ex multiple times

OLD RESPONSE:
Nodding, pivoting, and hoping it won't be an issue later.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
"It sounds like she still takes up a lot of space for you. Is that something you've worked through?"

SCENARIO: The conversation feels one-sided — he just talks about himself

OLD RESPONSE:
Waiting patiently for him to remember you're there.

SOUL CHECK RESPONSE:
Ask a question about him, then follow immediately with: "What do you want to know about me?"

GRACEFUL EXIT: IF YOU NEED TO LEAVE EARLY

"I need to wrap up a bit sooner than I planned — but it was lovely to meet you."

"I'm going to head out. Thank you for making time to meet."

"This was a nice way to spend an afternoon. I wish you all the best."

You do not owe anyone an explanation for leaving. "No" is a complete sentence.

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09 | AFTER THE DATE: YOUR CHECK-IN

Before you text your friend. Before you check his profile again. Before your rational mind starts building a case for or against him — do your own check-in first. Your unfiltered response in the first 30 minutes after a date is often your most accurate.

THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE CHECK (FIRST 30 MINUTES)

- What is the very first feeling that shows up when I think about seeing him again?
- Do I feel more energized or more tired than I did before I arrived?
- Was I myself in there — or a version of myself designed to impress him?
- Is there anything I'm already trying to explain away or rationalize?
- What did my body tell me during the date that I didn't fully acknowledge?

THE TWO-HOUR AFTER-EFFECT ASSESSMENT

Two hours after an interaction, your nervous system has had time to process. How you feel now — without the adrenaline of the date itself — is highly informative.

- Energy Status: Am I more energized or more depleted than my baseline? Healthy people enhance energy; problematic ones deplete it eve
- Mental Clarity: Are my thoughts about him clear and warm — or am I confused, overanalyzing, or trying to "figure him out"? Confusion ofte
- Emotional Tone: What's the overall emotional feeling when I let myself think about him without analysis? Peaceful anticipation? Vague anx
- Body Relaxation: Has my body returned to its normal resting state — or am I still holding tension from the interaction without realizing it?

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09 | JOURNALING PROMPTS AFTER YOUR DATE

If you have a few minutes and a journal — or just a notes app — these prompts help you consolidate what your body wisdom is already telling you.

The moment I felt most at ease during the date was...

The moment something felt slightly off — or I noticed tension — was...

When I picture spending an entire evening with this person, I feel...

What I noticed about how he treated others (server, passersby) was...

The thing I want to pay closer attention to on a second date, if there is one, is...

What my gut is saying right now, before I think too much about it, is...

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10 | YOUR PERSONAL STANDARDS WORKSHEET

The time to define your non-negotiables is **before** you're in the middle of a promising connection — not during one. Fill this out once, revisit it before every first date, and let it anchor you when chemistry starts doing the reasoning.

MY ABSOLUTE NON-NEGOTIABLES (DEAL-BREAKERS)

These are behaviors, character traits, or life circumstances I will not accept — regardless of chemistry:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

WHAT I AM GENUINELY LOOKING FOR

The qualities, values, and dynamics I actually want in a partner at this stage of my life:

1.

2.

3.

4.

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5.

THE FEELING I AM LOOKING FOR

Not the checklist — the feeling. When I'm with the right person, I feel...

In their presence, I feel:

The version of myself I am with them is:

After I spend time with them, I feel:

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11 | WORDS THAT WORK: YOUR PHRASE GUIDE

Having a few ready phrases isn't scripted — it's prepared. When you know what you're going to say in advance, you don't freeze, over-explain, or say yes when you mean no. These are the phrases that keep your standards and your grace intact simultaneously.

WHEN YOU NEED TO REDIRECT

"I'd rather not go there on a first date — but ask me again sometime."	Warm, sets a boundary, leaves the door open appropriately.
"That's a bigger conversation — let's start somewhere lighter."	Redirects without shame or over-explanation.
"I have strong feelings about that. Maybe a story for another time."	Signals depth without oversharing.

WHEN DECLINING A SECOND DATE

"Thank you for today — I don't feel a romantic connection, but I wish you all the best."	Direct, kind, no false hope.
"I enjoyed meeting you, but I don't think we're the right fit. I hope you find exactly who you're looking for."	Warm closure, no explanation required.
"I've thought about it, and I'm going to pass — but genuinely, thank you."	Clean and final. No elaboration needed.

WHEN SLOWING THINGS DOWN

"I like taking things slowly — it helps me trust what I'm feeling."	Frames your pace as wisdom, not rejection.
"I don't want to rush this. The best things tend to develop at their own pace."	Positions patience as a relationship value.
"I'm in no hurry — and I mean that as a compliment to the process."	Reassures without caving to pressure.

WHEN YOUR GUT SAYS NO — RIGHT NOW

"I appreciate you making time. I'm going to head out."	Simple, complete, no explanation.

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"Thank you for this — I think I have what I need. Take care."	Gives nothing away. Final.
"I'm going to wrap up. I wish you well."	You owe no one a story. This is enough.

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12 | A FINAL WORD BEFORE YOU GO

You have already survived harder things than one coffee date. You've raised children, rebuilt yourself after loss, navigated the legal and emotional aftermath of divorce, and figured out who you are on the other side of all of it.

That's not baggage. That's your qualification.

Walk in as the woman who knows her worth. Ask good questions. Listen to what his answers reveal about his character — not just the surface of his words. Watch how he treats the people around him who can't benefit him. Notice how your body feels, not just what your rational mind says.

And when you leave — before you text anyone, before you replay the conversation, before you analyze anything — just check in with yourself. Ask what you felt. Ask whether you felt like yourself. Ask whether something felt easy.

> ***The right man will feel easy. Not boring — easy. There is a profound difference, and your nervous system already knows which is which.***

He will be consistently kind — not just to you, but to everyone. His stories will be consistent. He will be genuinely interested in your thoughts and experiences. You will feel like yourself with him — not a better version, not a careful version. Just you.

Most importantly: you don't need to be grateful for attention from someone who doesn't recognize your worth. You are a gem. Act like it.

HEAL WHAT'S BROKEN. RECLAIM WHO YOU ARE. LOVE WHAT COMES NEXT.

Continue your journey at **EmpoweredAgingWomen.com** and **RealMomLife.com**

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CONTINUE YOUR SOUL CHECK JOURNEY

This guide is part of the Soul Check Dating System™ — a complete framework for dating wisely, confidently, and from a place of self-knowledge at this stage of your life. Each resource below builds on the last.

THE SOUL CHECK DATING SYSTEM™ *The Complete Guide*	The foundational body-wisdom dating framework for mature women. Includes the full Soul Check Method, warning signal vs. peace signal guide, red flag recognition system, and Christine's personal cautionary tales from her own dating journey after a 33-year marriage.	Available at **www.realmomlife.com**

ABOUT CHRISTINE MORIARTY

Christine Moriarty is an attorney, author of seven books, and a contributor to Sixty and Me and Patheos. After a 33-year marriage, she navigated the dating world — made all the rookie mistakes — and ultimately found her beloved second husband. She built the Soul Check Dating System™ from her own real experience, so you don't have to learn everything the hard way.

She writes about the hard and joyous parts of your Second Act at **RealMomLife.com** and **EmpoweredAgingWomen.com**.

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