



Do the maths to find your ideal match

If you never argue, move on to the next

Shared confidences make for a happy union

Joined at the hip? Then don't tie the knot

Two-year age-gap? It's time to get together

SHOULD YOU MARRY HER?

PROFESSIONAL HELP #1
YOUR LOVE LIFE EXPERTLY MANAGED

It's the biggie – and December is statistically the month you'll ask. But before popping the question, *MH's* pre-proposal professionals reveal how you can tell if she's really the one

IGNORE THE FIRST FOUR OR FIVE...

...says Professor Bruce Brown, a mathematician at the University of New South Wales

It's not the most romantic way to think of her, but your girlfriend is a random variable in the happiness equation that is your life, says Professor Brown. "Don't commit to the first 37% of women you get involved with. Then propose to the very next one who is better than all the previous." The average British male has 12.7 sexual partners over a lifetime so, if you trust the maths, the first four or five are out. This is based on an 'optimal stopping' formula, which calculates when to take a particular action in order to maximise your reward. Use Professor Brown's formula to work out if you're ready to propose... Choose the oldest age by which you want to marry (n). Select the age you'd settle down if the girl was right (p). **Calculate n - (pxo.368)** to find your optimal proposal age.

YES...

If above Optimal Age and your girlfriend's better than your ex.

NO...

If you're below Optimal Age and already doubtful. Wait, or break up.

A GOOD, FEISTY BUSINESS PARTNER MAKES A GOOD WIFE...

...says Jean Smith, an anthropologist who specialises in dating and flirting

"Couples that last evaluate each other not as lovers but as potential business partners," says Smith. "Would you let her make decisions on your behalf? Do you trust her not to let feelings mar her judgement? Do you share a vision for the future?" Answer these questions after 12-18 months when your judgement isn't clouded by

the first flushes of love. Then check your fighting style. Studies have found that couples who clash often are more content, have better sex, and stay together for longer.

YES...

If you trust her with big decisions, argue often, but make up quickly.

NO...

If you don't trust her and bottle up niggles instead of clearing the air.

IF SHE FIGHTS YOUR CORNER AND GOSSIPS, MARRY HER...

...says Dr Jo Setchell, a primatologist at Durham University

"Few primates pair-bond for life," warns Setchell, whose studies of apes and monkeys offer hints on whether a potential fiancée will push your evolutionary buttons. "But committed Titi monkeys chase off threats to their male and will abandon personal rewards – like food or shelter – to pursue a mate." If your girl fights your corner now – whether it's standing up for you to snarky friends or being supportive when you work

late, you've got a loyal ally for life. "Bonded primates also groom each other. Recent research suggests that the human equivalent of grooming has evolved into gossip. If she wants to share hers with you – and vice versa – signs point to mutual commitment."

YES...

If she stands up for you against large threats (like her mother).

NO...

If she puts herself first and doesn't want to share when gossiping.

BE HAPPY TO SPEND TIME APART

...says Amanda McAlister, head of family law at solicitors Russell, Jones & Walker

"The early signs that predict a doomed marriage are common," says McAlister, who has 13 years' experience of what underpins marital success or failure. "A loyal spouse won't begrudge hobbies or anything you do in your own time. If she does, it's the number one marriage wrecker." Look out for telltale eye rolls when you make 'me-time' plans. Research from the Gottman Relationship Institute in Seattle found was one of the most reliable divorce predictors. McAlister also cites any whiff of pressure to marry as a major 'Divorce Approaching' sign. "Whether it's from her, your family or Beyoncé, if you're pressured into putting a ring on it – you shouldn't do it."

YES...

If she's supportive of your interests and you feel the same about hers.

NO...

If you're proposing because her entire family is badgering you.

A TWO-YEAR AGE GAP AND YOU'RE GOOD TO WED...

...says Karen Gask, senior research officer for the Office of National Statistics

"I think of statistics as the entire country giving your marriage a test-run," says Gask. First, are you both earning professionals? Your marriage is nearly 50% more likely to last than couples who aren't. Men aged 30-34 on their wedding day see the greatest marriage success. Outside that age, your outlook is favourable if your wife-to-be is of a similar vintage. "For every year in age difference greater than two

years, the odds of staying together decreases by 3%," Gask says. Other studies indicate that if her parents split, she's twice as likely to divorce you. Finally, first-timers are 62% more likely to stay together than those who are re-marrying.

YES...

If you're careerists, in your early 30s, with up to a two-year age gap.

NO...

If either of your parents is divorced or there's an age gap. Or just go for it.

BAND TOGETHER

More 'yes' than 'no'? Go to Hutton-garden.net to find the perfect ring. More 'no' than 'yes'? You need an exit strategy. Head to tinyurl.com/MHbreakup for our online guide to leaving your lover. mh

If you're going to have a flutter, make sure she's a dead cert