

# Stuck in a 'talking stage' or 'situationship'? How young people can get more out of modern love

March 16 2023, by Raquel Peel

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There is talking and then there is the talking stage. Credit: [Pexels/Pavel Danilyuk](#), [CC BY](#)

"Going together" sounds like a romantic term from yesteryear. Today's

young people have a newer label: the "talking stage." It happens between being introduced to someone and officially dating, and it can involve talking or texting for days—even months.

The purpose of this stage is to have the opportunity to get to know someone before committing to a relationship with them.

But judging by their posts on [social media](#), [young people](#) all over the world are [struggling](#) with this modern-day dating phase. They can find it drawn-out, repetitive and emotionally draining.

Is it a new thing? And how can potential couples partners make the most of it?

## **New label, old practice**

The talking stage is not a new phenomenon, but instead a new take on what we know as traditional "courting."

Courting involves getting to know someone and building intimacy, often for an extended period of time, before committing to marriage.

Yet, not all relationships start with a courting or talking phase, some relationships start as a hook-up then progress to dating. This is because how people [communicate romantic interest](#) and initiate intimacy depends on personalities and [social context](#).

Nevertheless, [the global pandemic changed the way people date now](#). People who might not have chosen to date online previously, started pursuing dates via the internet or sometimes teledates via screens.

Dating using online apps spread the love by swapping, matching, and instant messaging—often with multiple partners and in large numbers.

Researchers termed this period "[jagged love](#)" and found it didn't lead to traditional courting and romance. People in this context move quickly between partners, searching for meaningful connections and often feel disappointed with the outcome. There's a lot of potential for [sabotaging a relationship](#) before it even starts.

And there is a significant difference between the talking stage and traditional courting. Today, early conversations are accelerated by the amount of information publicly available about someone on the internet. So, for some people, talking or texting might feel like an unnecessary or tedious step, given what we can glean from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

But the talking stage may be a way to solidify [fragile human bonds](#).

## Is it a 'situationship'?

In [online forums](#), young people report feeling confused about how long to talk to someone before moving on, or what to discuss with a potential partner. So the talking stage might seem ambiguous, stressful or anxiety-provoking.

Young people are also confused about whether they are in a "situationship"—another [relationship status](#) with an ambiguous definition, used to describe non-committed but emotionally charged intimate engagements. This one is similar to recent labels like "friends with benefits," "booty calls," or one-night stands.

Being in an undefined stage or relationship can impact mental health and well-being. [Relationship difficulties](#) are one of the most prominent reasons why people seek counseling and a significant contributor to anxiety, depression, and thoughts of self harm. Counseling services in Australia [report](#) the most common reasons for seeking counseling

include relationship conflict, inadequate interpersonal skills to initiate or establish significant relationships, family violence, and sexual assault.

Fear of being hurt, abandoned, rejected or trapped can be a [barrier](#) to forming and maintaining healthy long-term intimate engagements.

Being in a committed romantic relationship [decreases](#) the incidence of mental health issues when compared to ambiguous or casual engagements. This why [my research](#) focuses on increasing people's skills and confidence to navigate intimate partnerships.

## Good practice

Many people [lack relationship skills](#) such as insight, flexibility, maturity, confidence, effective communication and how to manage expectations. Being able to improve relationship skills is a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction and long-term relationship success.

Working out how to navigate an intimate relationship, by communicating needs honestly and creating opportunities to develop and explore a sense of self, can help people feel [more confident](#).

So, the talking stage is an opportunity to get to know a potential partner, explore compatibility, and improve relationship skills.

## 5 ways to make the talking stage better

It may be a bit confusing and open-ended, but there are ways to make the talking stage more helpful than stressful.

1. **Open communication**—make sure to express your needs, expectations, and be willing to also understand the needs and

- expectations of others in an honest way
2. **Explore compatibility**—the talking stage is an opportunity to explore whether a potential partner shares interests, values and morals
  3. **Define the relationship**—this stage is an opportunity to discuss the potential relationship and the type of romantic engagement. It is important all parties understand what the relationship is and where it is headed
  4. **Acceptance**—this insightful step involves understanding the talking stage or "situationship" might fizzle out and not turn into a [relationship](#) (which may hurt) and that this is a natural part of the process
  5. **Establish boundaries**—self-protection and safety are basic human instincts. So, it is important to know how to navigate this process in a healthy way by establishing boundaries for the intimate engagement early.

Humans are hardwired to search for intimate connections from birth. Modern times may have changed how we pursue and communicate love, but this innate instinct remains truly unbreakable and the talking stage can be an important part of it.

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