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Don't Text Your Ex Happy Birthday

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203 — Don’t Text Your Ex Happy Birthday with Nick Viall

Amy Morin:

Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength. Every Monday, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips can inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life.

The fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week. Now let's dive into today's episode!

Are you tired or frustrated by the whole dating experience? Have you experienced a lot of heartache in your romantic relationships? Do you struggle to understand why your relationships don't last? If you answered yes to any of those questions, today's episode is for you. We're talking about dating and relationships.

In therapy, we talk about what's needed in a successful romantic relationship, the three C's: chemistry, compatibility, and commitment. It's easy to know whether you have chemistry with someone. If you're physically attracted, and you like spending time together, and it feels good, you have this one covered.

Compatibility refers to the idea that your personalities can match and your long-term values are in line. Do you have similar goals for the future? Do you share similar beliefs about life, money, and family? Those sorts of things.

Commitment is about how much the two of you want to commit to each other. You don't necessarily need to decide that you're in a long-term commitment. You just need to be on the same page about what level of commitment you have. While all that sounds simple and straightforward on the surface, finding a partner is complicated.
Emotions can cloud your judgment, and the words coming out of someone else’s mouth might not line up with their behavior, which can leave you feeling confused. Of course, there are going to be disagreements, conflict, and struggles that make the whole dating experience difficult.

Here today to clear up how you can navigate the dating scene is Nick Viall. You might know him from The Bachelor franchise. Before you roll your eyes and think that a former bachelor contestant isn't going to help your dating life, listen to this. He has a new book out called Don't Text Your Ex Happy Birthday.

I read it, and it's solid relationship advice. He's learned a lot from his breakups, his mishaps, and his dating disasters. Some of the things he talks about today are the lies we often tell ourselves when we're dating, how our egos can get in the way, and the strategies we can use to establish healthy boundaries.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for The Therapist's Take. It's the part of the show where I'll break down some of Nick's strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here’s Nick Viall on how to avoid some of the biggest emotional and behavioral mistakes in the dating world.

Amy Morin:

Nick Viall, welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

I'm a therapist. When I saw that you had a book coming out, I'll admit, I kind of raised an eyebrow like, oh good. The bachelor's now writing a relationship book, but I have to say it's really good.

I read it, and your advice is quite solid. Your book is called Don't Text Your Ex Happy Birthday: And Other Advice on Love, Sex, and Dating. I think you did a really good job giving out solid advice to readers.

Nick Viall:

Well, I appreciate it. That certainly means a lot. Being someone from the Bachelor franchise comes with its pros and cons. Advice I will give to my peers who are coming off the show... I remind them that the show will give you incredible access but won't give you any credibility. It's something I've always been mindful of. I appreciate hearing that from you.

As you know, if you read the book, I'm quick to mention that I'm not an expert. I'm not a therapist. I haven't studied it. I have lived some of these experiences. If you find my advice to be helpful, wonderful, but, certainly, always consult with your actual therapist on all questions related to your mental health.

Amy Morin:
You touch on some things and, I think, our universal problems that a lot of people experience and struggle to put into words. You did a great job breaking those things down. One of them, you talk pretty early on in the book about the fact that we lie to ourselves. I'd love to know, why do you think we lie so much to ourselves when it comes to our relationships?

Nick Viall:
Well, first and foremost, I think the reason we lie to ourselves more than anyone else is because we're the person we talk to the most. For someone like myself who is kind of a heady, in-your-head person, it's just very easy to try to... Well, or rather, it's actually harder to know sometimes in the moment what's best for you in the immediate future and what's best for you long-term, right?
I think sometimes we will give into things like boredom and loneliness. We will focus on what our egos are telling us. We will seek validation rather than what might be better for our hearts.
I think that just makes it really easy for us to lie to ourselves because it's just so easy to negotiate with ourselves with the boundaries we set. It's just like, "Oh, do I really... I mean, maybe I just want to hook up with someone. You know what? I'm sex positive," and things like that.
Even, deep down, you know that you have feelings for this person and maybe sleeping them once again after you've already tried to define a boundary and say, "Hey, listen. I really like you. I want to see where this goes." They give you the old, "Well, I'm not looking for a relationship right now, but I like hanging out with you." Then you're like, "Well, I'm cool. I can handle that. I'm mature, I can be in control of my feelings."
Sometimes we have to be gentler to ourselves about some of our own limitations, and realize that's okay and that's good. It's just very easy to try to give into that because we hate being bored. We hate having nothing to do. Sometimes we would rather feel pain than boredom. It's pretty easy to then lie to ourselves, especially when we're feeling down, or things seem slow. We're feeling lonely and things like that.

Amy Morin:
That was a part of your book that really stuck out to me too, is when you talked about that, that when given the option between boredom and pain, people will often choose pain, something we don't really talk about often. It doesn't really make sense. We'd think, "No, I'd choose boredom all day long," but the truth is, we'll often opt for pain, won't we?

Nick Viall:
Yeah, because I mean, at the end of the day, pain is stimulation, right, and so is love. Our brain wants to feel stimulated. It just will seek out something rather than nothing even if that something is pain.

Amy Morin:
Something you mentioned too, but early on in your book, you get pretty clear on expectations, and boundaries, and the difference between the two. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Nick Viall:
Yeah, I mean expectations are the goals that you have for a relationship, right? I want to be in a monogamous relationship. I only want to date one person. I want to be with someone who makes me feel like a priority or that I talk to on a regular basis. Those are expectations you want to be able to communicate.

I think boundaries is something where people get confused. Boundaries are something you set with yourself. A boundary would be like, I don't want to have sex with someone who isn't committed to me or is also sleeping with other people. A boundary could be, if I'm participating in hookup culture, I want to make sure I always have protected sex, right?

Now you set the boundary with yourself. Then you want to communicate that boundary with the person you're with, and then you want to be able to enforce that boundary. Oftentimes, the hard part about enforcing a boundary is you sometimes have to walk away or say no to what you say you want.

Maybe it's the relationship with a certain person. We want other people to respect our boundaries, but it's up to us to enforce those boundaries. The more we enforce them, the more likely other people are to respect them.

Amy Morin:
So often, people get that wrong about what a boundary is. We think it's because we want to change somebody else's behavior. You say, "Don't call me after 10:00 PM," but then we're thinking, "Because then they'll start calling me earlier," or we tell people not to do these certain things in hopes that it will somehow shift their behavior.

Then we get mad if they don't change their behavior, but, really, it's just showing that, okay, this is my boundary. I set it. What am I going to do about it now? If this person doesn't change their behavior, I have to make a choice.

Nick Viall:
Yeah, that's really the tough part and something, certainly, I had struggled with for a big part of my adult life. Kind of like I said, everything I wrote in the book is something I had to learn the hard way. Once you learn that skill, it becomes a lot easier.

You also just feel in more control because it's very easy to not respect the boundaries we set for ourselves and then, again, renegotiate with ourselves about, do I really want that to be a boundary? Because right now, this boundary feels really inconvenient to the thing I want the most. That is the challenge. The more you can do that, the better you're communicating, the less confused you feel. You feel way more in control. You feel way more powerful.

Amy Morin:
Why do you think it is, though, that sometimes we are so slow to talk about our level of commitment? So many people are in this gray area where they're like, "What are we doing? What do we call this? Is this going to be a long-term thing?" It feels like such an uncomfortable thing for people to bring up sometimes.

Nick Viall:
It really does. I mean, it's kind of crazy, right? I mean, people seem to be far more likely to just hook up with someone and sleep with someone they barely know, but the idea of defining a relationship is like a non-starter for so many people.

I really think a lot has to do with the paralysis of choice that social media and dating apps bring us. I think dating apps can be great. I'm pro dating app, but you really have to have, again, boundaries with yourself about how you utilize those dating apps, right, because, also, dating apps... I also call them kind of validation tools, right, and also rejection tools because even subconsciously, when you're on a dating app, you know how it works.

You swipe right. You swipe left. Every time you swipe right with someone, immediately, if you don't match, your subconscious is feeling rejected. Then every time you feel rejected, and then your ego pops up wanting more and more validation. You really got to be careful about how you use dating apps.

We have so much access to everybody. I think everyone... They want to find their perfect person, right? I use the analogy in my book. You go on Netflix. Back in the day when you had basic cable, and my parents didn't even have cable. I had four channels, right?

Amy Morin:
Me too.

Nick Viall:
Saturday afternoon rolls around. You’re cleaning the house. You put on TNT. Legally Blonde is on, or the Fugitive is on, or Shawshank Redemption. It’s a classic movie. No matter where that movie was, you are happy to have it on, and you’d start watching it.

Now when you turn on Netflix, there’s literally thousands of choices. We’ll spend 30, 40 minutes just watching all these previews, constantly looking for that perfect preview. We’re looking to just start a movie just to see if we like it or not, knowing that if we don’t like it, we could always just turn it off, right?

Dating’s the same way, right? Sometimes you just have to start the movie. You have to get to know someone. You have to invest some of your time and have them invest theirs. Prioritize each other. Ask questions, get to know.

Listen, breakups are tough, but in two or three months when you realize, hey, maybe we’re just not compatible as we thought we can be, you can end things. At least you’re getting somewhere. At least you’re going to know people.

Nowadays we’re spending all this time hanging out, sleeping with each other, not really communicating, not really getting to know each other. We’re so afraid of committing that then, we’ll kind of have one foot in, one foot out. Then that just leads to more confusion, more frustration. Everyone’s just so noncommittal.

I think we all have the best intentions, right? We want that fairytale ending, but sometimes we just have to be willing to press play, watch the movie, see if we like it, and then decide if we want to keep watching.

Amy Morin:
I think that’s where that honesty with ourselves comes in because sometimes people are quick to say, “I’m going to move in with somebody,” but they haven’t even had a conversation yet about their level of commitment or where this is going, and yet they just make assumptions, or maybe they lie to themselves about their partner’s behavior and think, "Well, they’re only doing this because of X, Y, and Z."

They’re showing you they’re not all that committed. On the other hand, your wishful thinking thinks, "Well, maybe they’ll change," or we make excuses for it.

Nick Viall:
I mean, exactly, because I think... That’s where I kind of talk about that meeting your ego, which was a big pivotal moment in my life after I got cheated on by my then fiance. I realized so many of my choices that I was making in life, and especially in my relationships, were more ego-driven and the desire to feel special, or what people would think about me, or how this would look.

I realized, "Boy, I was just setting myself up for failure." I was dating someone that I thought we looked good together and that kind of fit into a certain bucket, only to reflect
back and go, "I don't know if we were compatible at all." I don't know if we really even enjoyed being around each other, but we sure liked taking pictures with each other. We sure liked showing up to parties together and things like that.

It's kind of embarrassing to admit, but I think we all do that because our ego's always in our head, telling us, "You have to be the best. You have to be special. You have to win." It's that kind of youthful feeling.

I remember my first girlfriend. Me and my buddy... I met my first girlfriend, and my buddy met her friend. The two of us were all double dating. I remember us kind of jokingly had these conversations about... It wasn't always joking, right? It was like, "Which couple's more in love?" It's stuff like that.

We wanted to be more in love. It's so trivial and not important, especially if you're comparing yourself to other relationships or other people. At the end of the day, relationship to me is all about just a team, a partnership, trying to build that partnership and that relationship up together.

Nothing else really matters. It doesn't really matter what other people are doing or what they're saying, but as long as you guys are there for each other and supporting each other, I think that's what it's really all about. It's definitely a challenge.

Amy Morin:

One of the things you talk about in your book is those pet peeves versus non-negotiables. I know people who have dated somebody that's a completely different religion. For them, maybe that was a deal breaker. We can't ever get married, and my values aren't going to change.

Nick Viall:

Sure.

Amy Morin:

But yet we're still going to date for four years. We don't really know why because this isn't... In the end, this isn't going to turn out well, but we don't want to break up either. They don't really have that conversation. Well, this would be a non-negotiable. We probably shouldn't get started.

Nick Viall:

That can be a challenge, exactly. I mean, sometimes living long distance is a non-negotiable, or religion, or family values. I mean, those are important things.

Again, that comes down to having a conversation with yourself first. What's truly important to me? Not only what do I want now, but what do I want for myself in the future?
A tough lesson I had to learn is love does not conquer all. Love is not the answer for everything. You have to be able to be on the same page. You have to be able to communicate. You have to have compatibility for love to flourish, right, because if you don't have those things, then love can't... Love takes work and time, and it can be super rewarding. It can be wonderful and the greatest thing of all time.

If you guys are constantly trying to negotiate with your true core values, you just end up resenting one another, and then you start asking the person you say you love to... At the end of the day, if you are cognizant of your non-negotiables, and you don't have that conversation with the people you date, ultimately, the two of you are going to be constantly asking the other person to sacrifice their boundaries. If you're doing that in any relationship, that's just always going to lead to resentment. Compatibility is a big part of relationships. I think sometimes, again, that kind of youthful love... It doesn't matter. I love you. We'll figure it out, type of thing. You really need to have those kind of deep conversations and understand what's truly important to us.

Do you want kids? Do you not want to have kids? Those things aren't going to change, typically, over time. All the people, it's just like, "Well, they don't want kids now, but we'll wait and see. They have a good job. They make money. We laugh together. We like the same movies." Those are all nice, but when you have a non-negotiable that really takes away from your core values, that can really... You're starting a relationship, basically, six feet under, so to speak, or you're starting from behind. It puts too much stress on a relationship that requires that kind of communication and understanding that allows people to flourish in a relationship.

Amy Morin:
Right. Then instead, we focus more on those pet peeves, like somebody who is slightly messy, or they're late for five minutes. We think that that makes them a bad person to date. Yet, at the same time, we don't really look at the bigger picture. Do you think most people know what their non-negotiables are?

Nick Viall:
I think they know, but I think most people don't take the time to think about them, right? I think deep down, we really know, but I think sometimes we like to ignore those conversations we should have with ourselves. I often think we're rarely ever communicating with them because, listen... I empathize, right?

It's hard to find people we are connected to. It's hard these days to get excited about someone. Once we get excited, we just want to focus on that excitement. Then again, that's where that lying to yourself comes in. Well, we'll kind of conveniently ignore
questions that we probably should be asking because we don’t want to ruin this kind of moment. We don’t want to ruin this good thing. That’s the challenge.

Amy Morin:
Then you did a good job in your book talking about the difference between emotions and emotional connection, right, that excitement that we feel early on in a relationship, yet we don’t have those deeper conversations. We get the two confused.

Nick Viall:
I really wanted to tackle hookup culture, which is obviously something that’s really taken over the dating space these days. Now that we’re more sex positive as a society, we are settling down later in life. Therefore, with dating apps and meeting people, more people are prone to participate in hookup culture and be intimate with people.

They’re not in maybe committed relationships, which I participated in that. Certainly, no judgment, but I still think when it comes to having sex, it’s still a very powerful thing. We have to make sure that we really understand that difference between emotional and emotional connection because we can feel, like you said, any type of emotion, right? Even feeling anxious can sometimes mask itself as, ooh, I’m really excited about them.

Emotional connection really comes down to truly knowing each other, right, feeling safe around that person. Having an emotional connection means that you’re not wondering how they feel about you, right? You’re not worried if you say something silly or dumb that if... Is it going to completely change how they feel about you? You’re feeling more secure, and you have clarity rather than confused and insecure, right?

Early on in dating, that takes a long time. The first few months, most of the time, especially since we’re often not defining a relationship, we could be sleeping with someone for six to eight weeks and still feeling a little confused about how they feel about us. Not totally sure. Am I texting them too much or things like that? We’re sleeping with them.

Again, that’s fine. Again, that leads to the disappointment. I always say, "The less you know, more likely things are to change." We usually don’t know much about people early on in dating. I think it’s really important to just know the difference between any type of emotion and emotional connection.

If you are going to, say, participate in hookup culture, just do that knowing that you most likely don’t have the emotional connection. If not, things can change drastically. Do so knowing that’s the case.

At least you’ll be prepared for things to change rather than, again, lie to ourselves about, “Well, I really like them. I know them. I’ve spent every day with them for a week, and we know a lot about each other. There’s no way our feelings can change.”
That's just not being realistic. Then we set ourselves up for major heartbreak and disappointment, and that leads us to feeling used and let on. Certainly, people are going to lie to us. We can't control what people do, but the more we can just be honest with ourselves about our emotions for this relationship, and how strong they are, and how much clarity we have versus how much confusion we have, that'll go a long way to avoiding us getting disappointed.

Amy Morin:
One of the things I was finding a lot for people that would come into therapy is they would meet somebody on a dating app, and they would believe how the person described themselves hook, line, and sinker. Then that didn't really match up with the person's behavior.
They're like, "Well, the description of this person was that they love this, and they're adventurous, and they're a family person." Then they would meet them, and that didn't really line up. It would take a while for them to catch up and be like, "Oh, this person's description of themselves doesn't match up with the behavior that I'm seeing."

Nick Viall:
Yeah, I mean, totally. There's, I think, a section in my book called Never Stop Learning. It's kind of based off that premise. Again, it's hard to find a connection. I've made this mistake so many times in my life, right?
What I've noticed, especially with people calling into my show, is that we have this tendency of... We want to find that connection. Once we find it, we'll latch onto it and say, "Oh, finally, I'm excited. I like this person."
From that moment forward, there's something in our brain just turns off wanting to learn anything about them. Then that focus is, well, now I want them to like me. Then if I get them to like me, well, let's just protect this bubble of me liking you, and you liking me. Actually, let's just stop getting to know each other.
I mean, no one's actually saying that, but essentially, that's what people are doing. They're not really checking in. If you go on a date with someone for three or four dates, and then maybe they do or say something that... You think, "Oh man. That just doesn't feel right in my gut. Well, you know what? Everything else is great. This is exciting. I'm attracted to them. This is great. We're having fun. I'm not going to ask. I don't want to ruin this thing."
I think it's just really important, I think in all stages of relationship, to check in anytime you notice change, early. I mean, my girlfriend and I now... We've been dating for two years, and I still feel like we're still in the fairly early stages of our relationship. I mean, we're living together. It's very serious. We're talking very serious next steps.
We try to work on, when we notice something, we just say, "Hey, listen. Babe, can I just ask you about this? I'm feeling this. I don't know. It's not your fault. It's not mine. I don't know. I don't even know if it's anyone's fault. I just know I'm feeling this, and I want to address it with you and just talk about it."

That's something we started doing. I haven't done that in any relationship prior to this one. It can be scary because that often leads to awkward conversations. It can lead to one of us or both of us feeling a little defensive, but I think if you address it more early on, it's easier to find resolution rather than get stuck in conflict.

You just really have to check in and keep learning about the person you're dating and being willing to find out more, even at the risk of finding out something you don't like, because the upside is the more you learn, the more exciting it is.

People always ask, "How do you keep the spark alive?" I don't have all the answers to that, but I do know that if you are always interested in learning about who your partner is, because we're always changing as people, that does make things a little bit more exciting.

Amy Morin:
It definitely does. A lot of people come into my therapy office and say, "Well, my partner's changed over the years." Well, let's hope so. Let's hope they're growing and changing. It doesn't mean that you can't grow alongside them, or you can't still love them, even though they might not be exactly the same person, but their values are probably still going to be the same.

Nick Viall:
Totally. I think that comes down to the more you can practice early on to check in with the person you're dating, and just ask them questions, and just tell yourself, "I like what I know so far, but I want to keep learning," and challenge yourself to keep getting to know each other... Ask questions.

If you do it in a fun way, it don't have to feel like an interrogation. Just always be willing to just peel back those layers, and ask them what they think or feel about a situation, and get into it because that can be... Again, it can be scary because we're always worried of it ruining a good thing, but if it goes right, you're building such a strong foundation that can really keep that relationship strong for a long time.

Amy Morin:
Something you said earlier, too, about how early on in a relationship, sometimes we're more focused on getting the other person to like us and we pay less attention because it feels good when somebody likes you. They hold you up on a pedestal. In your book, you talk a lot about ego and how you came to a point where you were able to say, "If I
got cheated on, that's not necessarily a reflection of me. It's a reflection of the other person's behavior." How did you get to that point?

Nick Viall:

Well, it took a while. Well, I started thinking about my ego. That was the time and when it happened. I just was like, "Why do I feel such shame? I didn't do anything." I'm not saying I was a perfect partner, but I definitely was faithful, right?

I started asking that question. I talk about this in my book. I just kind of thought to myself, "I'm just going to start telling people I got cheated on," because before I was so embarrassed to acknowledge it. I just pretended it didn't happen.

The reaction kind of surprised me. It's common sense. Everyone was like, "Oh, that was really crappy of her." No one looked at me like there was anything wrong with me, but that was just my ego telling me something was wrong with me. My ego was saying, "Well, why'd you let this happen? No one was ever supposed to cheat on you. You're special."

The truth is that can happen to anyone. Obviously, we see in the news all these celebrities cheating. They have these super attractive partners with a lot of fame. We all act surprised. Anyone can cheat on anyone, right, because it comes down to trying to fill some sort of need that you're not getting. You do it in a very kind of immature and selfish way.

I'll tell you what. If you can get to that place, not only are you no longer judging yourself for getting cheated, you just live with less fear. Actually, I got asked a question not too long ago about, "What would you do if Natalie cheated on you?"

Her mom actually recently reminded me of this question I got sent because, unfortunately, her mom... This happened to her mom recently with her boyfriend. She was kind of struggling. She reminded me of it. Let me just bring it up quick.

Someone said, "Natalie is so beautiful. She can have anyone she wants. Do you ever get scared she could cheat?" I wrote back, "Her beauty has nothing to do with her integrity. I love knowing she has options and chooses me. If she did cheat, then she would cease to be the person I love and believed in. I would be sad about losing what I thought I had, but it would be her problem to face, not mine. I don't love scared."

Again, it just comes down to, you can be sad about a situation happening, but from that point forward, it was just like, well, I'm just going to choose to love the person. So many people... If they get cheated on, they hold that weight and bring it in their next relationship and then start questioning their future partner.

I just refuse to let that happen to me because, again, you can never control what people control. I thought, "Well, what can I do to increase communication? What can I do to make sure that I'm not ignoring the red flags, and I'm not ignoring my gut?" I don't want
to watch my partner. I don't want to say, "Well, don't... As she goes out with her girls, "Well, hey. Be good," type of thing.

Amy Morin:
Right.

Nick Viall:
It's her choice. I want her to choose to want to be with me. When people don't, you can be sad, but you're just no longer afraid anymore because you realize that you still have your character. You still have your integrity. While people may disappoint you, it's not a reflection of you. It just becomes almost the opposite effect of never worrying about being cheated on.
Once I was cheated on and understood that, I stopped ever worrying about being cheated on just because it was just like, well, then that will just be... That's something you're going to have to deal with. I'll be sad, but I won't worry about what I'm going to do. I will heal and move forward.

Amy Morin:
Right. I've never met anybody whose behavior was able to prevent somebody from cheating if they were with somebody who's going to cheat. Snooping, spying, lecturing... All of those things tend to backfire-

Nick Viall:
They do.

Amy Morin:
... and don't work out.

Nick Viall:
We all act like, oh, well, how do I stop my next partner from cheating? I was like, "Well, I don't really... " Just communicate and really understand who they are.

Amy Morin:
Last question. One more piece of advice. If somebody says, "Gee, I haven't found the right person yet, but I would really like to," where do they start, or what do they do differently? How do they get out there and say, "Okay, I'm ready to find that person?"

Nick Viall:
I think more than anything, I think it's awesome you're ready to get out there. Just be patient with yourself. The greatest things in life almost never come when we want them to come. If you are someone who is searching for a monogamous relationship to last you a lifetime, that can be an incredibly special thing.

Just remember, hopefully, all of us have a long life to live, so to speak, and great things take time to build. Be patient with yourself. Enjoy the journey. There's a difference between being single and being alone. Just because you're single, you're not alone.

Take advantage of the opportunity to date. It can be a grind. It has its frustrations, but it's also exciting and fun. It makes for great stories. You always miss that freedom when it ends and things like that. Just kind of get back out there.

Know when to take breaks, just like working out. You can work out too much and fatigue your body. You have to know when to rest. Take those breaks. Have a good community of friends. Just get out there, and get on the apps. Know when to take a break.

Eventually, it's going to find it as long as you can just try to be honest with yourself. Set up for upfront expectations. I firmly believe that if you do all that, everyone's going to find their person. They just might have to be a little bit more patient than they want.

Amy Morin:
All right. Now, I know I said last question, but I do have one more. Why should you not text your ex happy birthday?

Nick Viall:
Well, because it's never with the intentions that you actually want. I mean, listen. If you've been broken up with your ex for five years, you guys are completely different, and you have a true friendship, text away. It's those weeks or months that follow a breakup. We're always looking for that excuse to reconnect, right?

If you're the person who's been broken up with, you're looking for that closure that you think the other person can give you, but, really, it's up to you. You just want to check in and hope that they miss you. Trust me, it's just going to be a reminder that they still don't want to be with you because nothing's worse than wishing them a happy birthday, and they just go, "Thanks."

Amy Morin:
Right.

Nick Viall:
Then if you're the person who broke up with somebody, and you think you're doing something nice, you're not because when they get that notification with your name and that split second between them getting the notification and reading your message that
simply just says, “Happy birthday. I hope you have a great day,” and nothing else, you're just reminding them once again that you don't want to be with them. You just ruined their birthday rather than make it special.

It's never intended for what you want it to do. You're not being nice. You're not being considerate. If you truly respected the relationship that you had with them, let them have their day. Even if they think that you should reach out, that's because they think they want you back, and you're hoping you still care.

You have to really kind of separate that you're no longer together. Part of not texting your ex on your birthday is accepting that you are supposed to move forward, not backward.

Amy Morin:
Wise advice. I hope everybody goes out and picks up a copy of Don't Text Your Ex on their birthday.

Nick Viall:
Well, thank you so much. I appreciate you having me. It's been a ton of fun.

Amy Morin:
Oh, thanks for being here.

Amy Morin:
Welcome to The Therapist's Take! This is the part of the show where I'll give you my take on the strategies Nick shared and discuss how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of my favorite strategies that he talked about.

**Number one: get clear on your boundaries.** Nick talked a lot about the importance of establishing boundaries for you, not for someone else. This is really important, but it's tough to do. That's why we've talked about boundaries on the show several times before.

When you've set a boundary, like you decide you don't want someone to meet your children until you've been dating exclusively for a while, it's your job to ensure that you're going to enforce that boundary. That might mean telling someone they can't come to your place when the kids are home or that they can't meet your family yet.

You might create boundaries on your time, your physical space, your emotions, your money, your body, and your material things. Doing so essentially says to someone else, these are the rules on what I will or will not do.
If someone doesn't respect your boundaries, it doesn't mean you need to change your rules. Instead, it means you need to take a look at the relationship and why that person isn't respecting the rules. It might also be a sign that they don't respect your needs.

**Number two: identify your non-negotiables.** Nick talked about knowing what our non-negotiables are (like I can't be in a serious relationship with someone who wants kids or I can't date someone who has different political opinions).

When you start dating someone who exhibits something that you consider to be a non-negotiable, you should probably end the relationship. Don't stick around hoping that they'll change, and don't work on trying to change them. That's not going to work out for either of you. Instead, free yourself up so you can meet someone who you're more compatible with.

**Number three: check your ego.** Nick talked a lot about ego, and it's something he discusses a lot in his book. It's something to be aware of. Being with someone who's rich or someone who looks great might inflate your ego so much that you overlook the fact you weren't compatible with that person. Or you might find you get a self-esteem boost by being on dating apps even though you're also in a relationship where you want to be committed.

It's important to consider how your ego might be getting in the way of having a healthy relationship or how it might be keeping you stuck in a relationship that isn't necessarily one that has a long-term potential.

Those are three of Nick's strategies that I highly recommend. Get clear on your boundaries, identify your non-negotiables, and be aware of your ego getting in the way of healthy relationships.

If you want to hear more of Nick's tips, check out his book, *Don't Text Your Ex Happy Birthday: and Other Advice on Love, Sex, and Dating*. If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* As always, a big thank-you to my show's producer (who claims to have never seen a single episode of *The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, or Bachelor in Paradise*), Nick Valentin.