Honey

“Swipe right on confidence”: A Gen Z playbook for flirting on and offline

Online pressures, including micro-flirting and overanalyzing “digital body language,” are hindering genuine connections.

By Madelyn Gee | mgee@reckonmedia.com

February 12, 2024 at 1:30 pm CST



A girl scrolls through her phone as she lays on her couch in the dark. (Carlos Barquero/Getty Images)

A weekly newsletter for the chronically online and easily entertained. *Honey dishes us savvy analysis on culture, entertainment and power to make you the group chat MVP. Subscribe today!*

Your email address

Subscribe

On Feb. 6, the dating app Hinge released a report on its Gen Z users and how they view relationships.

The behavioral experts behind the report found that while 90% of Gen Z daters on the app want to find love, worries of being rejected are impacting them. Part of these fears and struggles can stem from Gen Z’s online presence, according to DatingScout expert Chris Pleines.

“Gen Z is finding it tougher to make real connections and find love, mainly because they’re always online,” Pleines said. “Social media and dating apps make it seem like there are endless options, leading to a lot of swiping but not much deep talking. Plus, everyone’s trying to look perfect online, which can make you feel like you’re not good enough.”



The strive for perfection can lead to expectations of perfection from others, with 56% of Hinge’s Gen Z daters admitting that they have overanalyzed someone’s “digital body language” before. This includes the use of punctuation, emojis, and average response time.

Those in Gen Z can also be too relaxed with their intentions, which is known as “micro flirting,” dating coach Connell Barrett said.

“They can be a little bit too subtle and come across maybe as friendly but not flirtatious, or socially interested but not making it clear they have romantic interest. I think people in Gen Z might struggle with sort of the good old fashioned ‘How do you flirt,’” Barrett said.

All of these factors can make it seem like flirting is a forgotten art – but according to sociologist and relationship coach Jenn Gunsaullus, it has just evolved.

“I do think it’s shifted some for this generation that has grown up in a digitized social landscape, in that they are best at a more playful, indirect expression of interest through memes and gifs. This likely does not translate to comfort around flirting in person because there is more pressure to think on one’s feet and it needs to be verbal,” Gunsaullus said.

Nevertheless, relationship experts have provided their own tips and tricks into taking those first steps in the dating world, starting with how to flirt in-person and online.

Putting your best foot forward online

For those on the dating apps, don’t go too heavy or negative on your profile, Susan Trombetti, matchmaker and CEO of Exclusive Matchmaking, told Well + Good in an interview in 2023.

“Think of your profile as a preview to your first date, so nothing should be too heavy, serious, or negative, but it should tell an honest story of who you are,” Trombetti said.



Along with a solid profile, sending over a funny meme (ex. The Rihanna wave) can help get the attention of the person of interest.

“Memes make people laugh, bring people together and in this case, get the flirty text messages going. Okay, the person you’re texting won’t immediately take their shirt off because you sent them a steamy meme, but it’ll definitely get you out of the ‘wyd? rabbit hole,” Amol Ahlawat wrote in a 2022 article for Bonobology.

If memes are not for you, then pickup lines may be the next best option.

When it comes to shooting your shot, a solid pickup line still works today, sex educator Suzannah Weiss wrote in a 2023 article for Top10.

You can go basic with a simple “Have you been here before?” when exploring a new place or you can make your intentions clearer by saying “Hey, you’re cute. Mind if I sit next to you?”

They can be lighthearted and fun without reaching cheesy territory, with numerous examples being found online.

Use of your social media accounts can also help get their attention. Watch their Instagram stories and like their online content – but don’t do this too many times to avoid looking creepy, Omar Sayyed said in a 2019 article for The Gentlemanual.

What else to know about flirting (online and in person)

Flirting today can seem like an impossible task, but experts in love and dating have tips for success:



1. Provide clarity

Barrett’s first rule of flirting is to let the person of interest clearly know that you are interested in them in a way that best suits your personality.

“It could be as simple as saying, ‘Hey, I like you and I would like to take you out on a date.’ … Use clear, simple, G-rated language to let the other person know that you have interest in them. If you can do that, then the other person can take that flirtatious card you’re putting on the table and then they might play their own card. Now we are in business,” Barrett said.

2. Genuine curiosity is key

Flirt by being genuinely interested in the person you are talking to, Gunsaullus said. “Ask questions and show interest in who they are and what matters to them.”

3. Be yourself (and utilize humor)

“Share things you actually like. A funny joke can make someone’s day and grab their attention,” Pleines said.

4. Keep the convo light

Don’t make the conversation all about how attractive they are or go down the sexual route, Barrett said.

Instead, “compliment something about them that you really like that’s not about their physical appearance like their personality, laugh, sense of humor … That is really attractive and it’s also charming, because it’s not just purely physical, it’s about you seeing the inner beauty.”



5. Body language is important

When talking to the person of interest, “keep your body open and facing them; it says, ‘I’m here to chat,’” Pleines said.

A person can also do subtle movements like touching the other person’s arm to show interest and that you are listening, according to Gunsaullus.

The art of flirting endures

It can be stressful to try to navigate a constantly changing dating scene. At the end of the day though, flirting is still a major key in getting a new boo.

“Even with all these changes, people still find ways to show they’re interested, keeping the game of flirting alive—just in a new, digital playground,” Pleines said.



Madelyn Gee | mgee@reckonmedia.com

Madelyn Gee is a journalist and screenwriter born and raised in Houston, Texas. After spending all day covering pop culture, lifestyle and entertainment, she finds solace in horror movies.

The Reckon Report.

Sign up to receive the Reckon Report newsletter in your inbox every Tuesday.

Enter your email

Subscribe

Find more newsletters here



The Reckon Report.

Sign up to receive the Reckon Report newsletter in your inbox every Tuesday.

Enter your email

Subscribe

Find more newsletters here