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THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS

ghosts

Nobody deserves to be ignored, but were you really in a relationship this whole time?

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So, I'm guessing you've heard all about the Charlize Theron and Sean Penn "ghosting" debacle. (For those of you who might not have heard this term before, "ghosting" is when one partner ends a romantic relationship by completely severing all communication with the other person.) It's been all over the Internet and it's paved the way for everyone to share his or her ghosting experience. Now, that said, the Theron/Penn experience is a very unusual occurrence because of the relationship they shared. Disappearing via ghosting is certainly not typical when you're engaged to be married. To be completely truthful, from my perspective and professional opinion, I am certain there was more pathology in their relationship than we will ever be privy to.

But enough of these celebs, let's talk about you.

You hear about this ghosting phenomenon and you think, "Hey! This has happened to me too!" You tell yourself you've been ghosted. You invested time, energy and emotion and sud-

denly this person is gone! The calls, texts and communication ceased without warning. You are confused! You replay it over and over in your mind, trying to uncover what you did wrong to make them disappear. After all, you've had weeks of interesting email and text exchanges and then you moved up to phone conversations that lasted for hours. Your first, second and third dates were fantastic with lots of chemistry. There were cute texts in the morning to say hello or to make sure you got home safely after the date.

Unexpectedly, things start to slow down, and then poof... they're gone. You are angry. You thought you were in a relationship! You spent hours on the phone discussing the personal details of each other's lives, and you had ongoing cute text exchanges. Your dates were really great—not to mention the intimacy. What is going on?

Allow me to be brutally honest and spell it out for you: You were never in a relationship. Yes, you read that right. Not. In.

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A. Relationship. I would define it more as just dating. Even if it had been months, you were just dating (perhaps with benefits). But, if I had to guess, I am sure you systematically created this larger than life relationship in your mind. In your mind there was more to the relationship than there really was. This person who “ghosted” you did not invest in you or the relationship, because if they had invested in you they never would have “ghosted” you. Period. Amen.

I am sure if you were honest with yourself and really took a look at it you would realize that the “relationship” you thought you had didn’t reflect one that was healthy and committed. Now, I would agree, whether it was dating or a more formal relationship, you should not have been “ghosted.” But when someone hasn’t invested in you, they do not feel compelled to end it appropriately. They feel it’s just easier to fade away from something that really wasn’t a priority for them. That sounds harsh, but sometimes the truth hurts.

So, now you’re thinking, “Julianne, tell me what it looks like when someone is investing in me so I’m not blindsided again.” Fine, I will. This is what it looks like when someone is investing in you.

1. **They call you regularly.** They want to hear your voice and don’t use texting as a main form of communication.

2. **They introduce you to the significant people in their life.** They are proud to be with you and don’t want to keep you a secret. This also means they see a future with you.
3. **They make you and your happiness a priority.** It’s not all about them. They work hard to make you happy. Your happiness is their happiness.
4. **They make their intentions clear.** You’re not guessing or making excuses for their behavior. You don’t have to, because they never make you second-guess.
5. **They make small thoughtful gestures.** You know that latte you love so much with the extra whipped cream and two sugars? They know it so they remember it and bring it to you without you even asking.
6. **They talk about a future with you.** It’s as simple as making plans to travel together, going to a special show or even a friend’s wedding to tell you they are investing time in you.
7. **They DON’T go poof!***

*In the end, if someone disappears or ghosts you, it is safe to say they didn’t value the relationship the same way you did. If this has happened to you more than once, perhaps it’s time for you to take a good look at the behavior you are accepting and reevaluate the type of people with whom you are keeping company.

Julianne Cantarella, MSW, LSW is New Jersey’s Premier Relationship Expert. She is a former therapist turned matchmaker and dating/relationship expert. A native of Bergen County, Julianne is dedicated to helping mature singles in New Jersey and Rockland County find love. She offers matchmaking and date/relationship coaching through her company, New Jersey’s Matchmaker, LLC. You can find out more at www.newjerseymatchmaker.com.