

Planning on skipping Valentine's this year? Don't! Looking at it in a different way can turn it from depressing into awesome. By Delia du Toit

# NO DATE, NO PROBLEM



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**V**alentine's Day – yeah, more like International Singles Awareness Day – is here and there's no other time of year when couples are cornier or being on your own seems harder.

On the flip side, you're not spending all your money on overpriced chocolates and flowers as couples scramble to find the perfect gift. See how a small change in your perspective can help?

And that, say the experts, is what you should do – not just around V-Day, but every day of the year. You deserve to be happy regardless of your relationship status, so focus on bringing your inner sunshine out.

## DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

Don't resent your coupled-up friends for their happiness, try to focus on being content by yourself. Or, at the very least, don't feel bad about being a little lonely, says Yoav van der Heyden, a psychologist from Cape Town.

'It's important to remember that we're social animals, so there's really nothing wrong with feeling lonely sometimes. It's often the thought that we shouldn't be feeling lonely or we shouldn't be alone that causes more suffering than actually being alone.'

Besides, he says, going out on a date or being one half of a couple on Valentine's Day is certainly not an indicator of a good relationship.

If you would like to find someone special, then being happy alone is the best place to start, says Susan Kriegler, a

psychologist from Pretoria. 'Nobody wants to be with an unhappy person. You are at your most attractive if you can enjoy your own company and delight in your life. So don't think about finding the right person, but concentrate on becoming the right person.'

This year, embrace the true meaning of Valentine's Day by celebrating love in all its forms – especially self-love.

## 'I LOVE ME'

Learning to love yourself is a lot harder than it sounds, says Yoav, because it's not about liking how your make-up looks or being happy with your new clothes, but rather accepting yourself as you are.

'Remember, there is no reason not to love yourself. It's a choice that gets easier and easier with practice,' he says.

Here's how to start practising: **Grow yourself** Read self-help and self-development books, chat to other singletons, take up meditation or consult a mentor to guide you in your personal growth.

**Feel great** Give yourself what you would expect a partner to give to you. Look in the mirror and tell yourself how beautiful you are, pamper yourself, give yourself thoughtful gifts and celebrate all your amazing talents, says Susan.

**Say it out loud** Close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting in front of another you and that they have a big smile on their face. Now imagine them saying: 'I love you', and then say it back to them, says Yoav.

Soon, that critical voice in your head will change to a kind and supportive one. ☺

## V is for value

Whether you're in a relationship or single, you deserve to feel valued. Susan has some tips for how you can do that:

- Give each of your single friends a small gift or card.
- Buy yourself a beautiful bunch of flowers.
- Do the things that are difficult to do when your time is occupied by a relationship, such as taking up a hobby like photography, learning how to play the guitar or to speak a new language.
- Join a fun group activity where you could meet new people, such as a hiking club, mountain biking or even boot camp.
- Arrange a great evening with your best friends. Host a scary movie marathon, have a Wii battle of the sexes or go out for dinner and dancing.
- If there aren't any humans nearby who you can love, give your heart to someone of a different species. Take your dog for a walk, or if you don't have one, volunteer at an animal shelter – they're always looking for help.

So, who said 14 February was only for couples? Happy Valentine's Day to you!