

Is 'Benching' the answer to playing the dating field?

From ghosting to situationships, there seems to be a new term created every day to define modern dating. But can these trends positively help us navigate the casual dating scene or are they just an excuse for a generation of commitment phobes?

"Things were casual but he would never let communication fade out. Then I found out he'd asked another girl to be his girlfriend. I had no clue he was dating other people, let alone for it to be that serious to become a relationship."

For Imogen, 19, trying to understand how to navigate single life and where she stood with the person she was casually dating proved difficult for her.

"We had never discussed if we were seeing other people but he always seemed really interested in me. He'd ask me on dates but they just never seemed to happen as he was always busy. Then I found out why."

After casually 'hanging out' with Joe for a few months, conversation started to dry up and they only seemed to meet up when it was convenient.

"I bumped into him in our local bar one night and he seemed really off with me. He then introduced me to his new girlfriend who was standing right next to him. I knew we weren't exclusive but realising I was just someone's back up option was so hurtful."

Whether it's 'the ick' or 'ghosting', new dating terms seem to be invented everyday, but one that is becoming increasingly popular is 'benching'. Benching is when you are dating someone and they have potential to be something more in the future, but not right now. You're just keeping them around until something better comes along or you find someone you actually want to commit to. It is essentially having a back up plan, another person you'd happily go into a relationship with if this one doesn't work out.

Just like 'being benched' in sports, it is the same in dating. The bencher keeps you in rotation whilst they play the field. They'll send a text every now and then, invite you round to 'hang out', maybe take you out for coffee if they have time or maybe won't even text you until you text them first. Sound awfully familiar? Then I'm afraid you're being benched.

Benching is a very common byproduct of today's swipe/ online dating culture where there seems to be too many options and something or someone better out there.

Dating shows, like 'Love Island', seem to be deeming this idea of keeping your

options open and dating people multiple at once as the norm. But is this what we're supposed to be doing?

"There are many reasons why people choose to date multiple people. Maybe they're not sure what they are looking for in a relationship, they may want to explore their options before settling down or they're afraid of getting hurt", says Alex Mellor-Brook, the Managing Director of 'Select Personal Introductions' dating agency, a Certified International Matchmaker and Science Based Relationship Coach & Columnist.

Meller- Brook, whose expertise has featured on 'The Real Housewives of Cheshire', says that casual or serial daters may use benching to keep their dating experience fresh, by rotating the people they date without ever committing.

"FOMO [the fear of missing out] can also be the reason behind benching someone, so they'd prefer to keep their options open. This could indicate a lack of clarity in what or whom they're looking for in a partner, leading to confusion for both parties if they start a relationship.

"Keeping dating casual and not committing to anything for the first few dates can help any anxiety you may experience when meeting new people and help you remain relaxed. However, it's essential to be transparent and honest with your dates about your intentions from the start", says Meller- Brook.

What do you do if you're being benched?

There are many indicators that you may be getting benched, including sporadic communication, lack of advanced planning, hesitancy to discuss feelings or future plans, continued use of dating apps, and not introducing you to important people in their life.

How do you respond to being benched?

"If you suspect you're being benched, ask the person directly. It's important to communicate your needs and expectations and be prepared to move on if they're not being met", Meller- Brook explains.

But what if you're the bencher?

Something casual is all Branwen, 20, is looking for, a year on from her break up. She wants to explore single life as she finds dating fun and a good way to meet new people. But how can 'not looking for anything serious' turn into benching?

"There's been times where I've been seeing a few people at once, whether it's going on dates or just casually texting and hanging out sometimes. I usually end up preferring one person over the other, whichever one I'm more comfortable with or whoever gives me more attention at the time."

However, Branwen worries that by wanting to keep her options open to find someone potentially more suited to her, she may be leading other people on.

"It's mean to potentially lead someone on but how do you tell someone that you're pitting them against other options and possibly looking for someone better.

"I feel like people nowadays don't even fully commit to one person straight away and do have back up options. If you're single, you're still seeing what's out there."

Being the bencher is a personal choice; however, being respectful and honest in relationships is key to preventing anyone from getting hurt, Meller-Brook explains.

Tips on how to bench and remain respectful: (SIDEBAR)

1. Be honest about your intentions: Let them know from the outset that you're not looking for anything serious and that you're continuing to date other people.
2. Respect boundaries: If they express their desire for a more serious commitment from you, be honest and clarify your intentions again so they understand your boundaries too.
3. Regular communication: This will help keep them informed about your plans and availability.
4. Never make promises you can't keep: If you are unable to commit to something, don't make that promise.

5. Be honest, open and respectful: Leading someone on will only hurt the other person emotionally.

But is benching really that bad?

Dating multiple people allows you to meet more people, gain new experiences and figure out what you're looking for in a relationship and in a partner. Also, you are less likely to get hurt if things with one person don't work out. However, dating multiple people can result in you hurting people's feelings if you develop stronger feelings for someone else. In addition, it can also be emotionally draining to juggle multiple relationships at once and can be very confusing to have feelings for more than one person.

Developing emotional attachments to multiple people at once is possible but it's important to remember that these attachments may not be as strong as the attachments you would develop in a committed relationship. It is essential to be honest with yourself and be prepared to end things if you develop stronger feelings for one person over another.

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Interviews:

- Imogen Gannon, 19- contacted me on social media about my post asking for people's experiences with benching. Interview was 26/04 at 11am.
- Branwen Hughes, 20- a friend who had discussed her dating experiences with me and related to benching. Interview 26/04 at 1pm.

- Alex Meller Brook, dating coach- contacted via email after finding his dating coach website and felt his expertise fitted the piece. Interview 19/04 at 4pm.



Imogen Gannon, 19



Alex Meller- Brook, dating coach



Branwen Hughes, 20