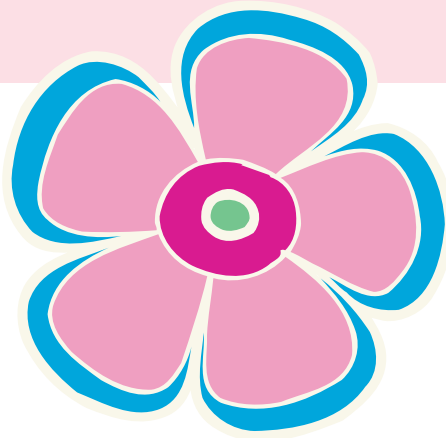


# THE ART OF



# Flirting

By Robin Friedman

**F**lirting is more than fun. It's a basic instinct. After all, if we didn't express interest in the opposite sex, we'd be extinct.

Flirting may even be the foundation of civilization as we know it. That's right, all our achievements, from the space shuttle to Walt Disney World, may merely be a side effect of our ability to charm.

## Saving the human race

Some of us have become so worried about offending that we're in danger of losing our natural talent for playfulness.

Knowing how to flirt — how to charm, how to flatter — is simply one piece of a studied, and practiced, presence.

To flirt is not to support caricatures of eyelash-batting and feigned helplessness. It's signaling a man using gestures that are universal, whether he's a stranger across a crowded room, your current boyfriend, or your husband of 25 years.

Studies show an exchange of admiring glances or light-hearted banter can brighten your day, raise your self-esteem, strengthen social bonds, and allow you to practice important communication skills.

Even though it's a means of expressing sexual interest, flirting can simply be entertainment, with no intention of developing a further relationship. Flirtatious encounters are of naturally short duration. It's understood there are no serious intentions, merely an ego-boosting acknowledgement of mutual attraction.

These light-hearted encounters are part of normal social interaction; not every passing exchange is a prelude to matrimony.

And if you're already attached, flirting

with your man is an essential — and mostly lost — art, right up there with seduction. Catching his eye at a party with a dazzling smile, winking at him occasionally, is all a part of the never-ending dance known as a longterm relationship.

Finally, to answer a burning question, there can be no flirting via computer. A computer is a machine devoid of voice, gesture, expression, and pheromones, all the mysterious messages that go back and forth in person.

So, to save us all from extinction, here's the definitive guide to the art of flirting.

## Hard-wired to flirt

Flirting has been part of human behavior for thousands of years.

Humans, like all animals, are hard-wired to flirt in order to attract, then judge, a mate.

Experiments on rats have shown that when traditional courtship rituals are inhibited, reproduction declines.

Of course human beings have other reasons to flirt — to get a promotion, raise our spirits or those of someone else — but flirting to seduce is organic, whether we're aware of it or not.

The key to successful flirting is not the ability to impress, but the knack of conveying you like someone.

Studies show when we meet someone new, their impression of us is based 55 percent on our appearance, 38 percent on our speaking skills, and 7 percent on what we actually say.

The customary greeting, "So nice to meet you," can convey "I find you intriguing," to "I have below-zero interest in you," depending on tone, expression, and posture.

Because stating feelings involves a high risk of rejection, non-verbal behavior becomes the essential form of flirting.

## The eyes have it

Your eyes are your most important communication tool.

We tend to think of our eyes as receivers of information, but they're high-powered transmitters too.

How you meet a person's gaze, and look away, can make all the difference between an enjoyable flirtation and an embarrassing encounter.

Direct eye contact is so powerful we normally restrict it to brief glances. Prolonged eye contact between two people indicates intense emotion — either an act of love or an act of hostility. It's so disturbing we normally avoid eye contact of more than one or two seconds.

This is good news for flirts.

You can signal your interest in someone merely by holding his gaze for more than one second. If he maintains eye contact with you for more than one second, chances are he returns your interest. (If he looks away briefly, and looks back at you a second time, you can assume he's still interested.)

If it triggers a smile, he's fascinated.

On the other hand, if he avoids making eye contact with you, or looks away after a fraction of a second and does not look back, he's not interested.

## Body language

Most of us are quite good at controlling our expression. But while we're busy controlling our expression, our real feelings leak out in our body language.

Leaning backwards and supporting the head are signs of boredom. Arms folded and legs tightly crossed indicate dislike.

Leaning forward, meanwhile, signals attentiveness and interest. Tilting the head to one side signals interest too.

Gender-specific body language is also a factor.

Men place their hands in their pockets to show interest. Women toss their hair and cross and re-cross their legs.