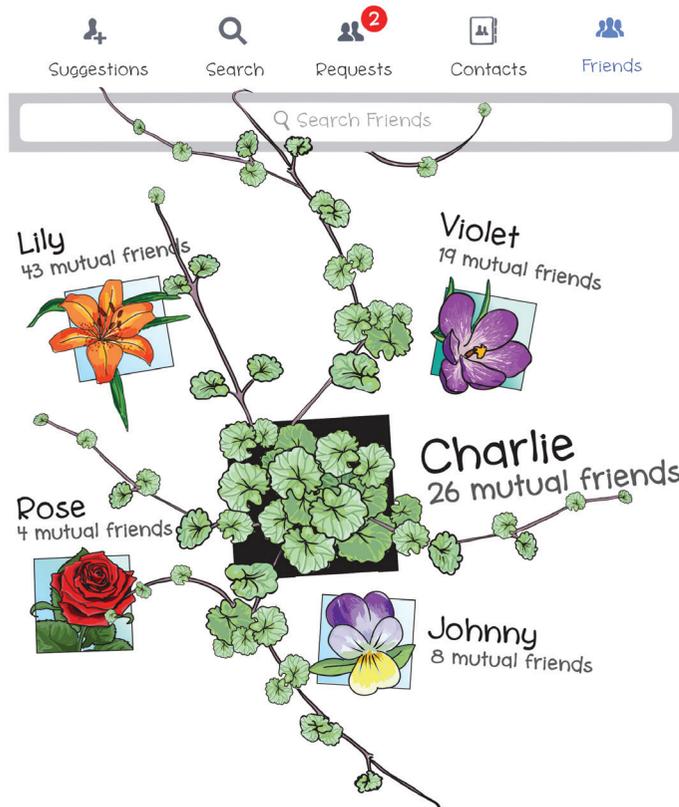


Dates & Nuts

Sliding into your DMs: Weeding out creeps on social media

By Stacey Rowe



Dear Stacey,

I'm a single girl with an active social life both on and offline. I recently met a guy—very briefly, I might add—at his place of business. He then sent me a friend request on Facebook. He seemed harmless, so I accepted. Since then, he has frequently messaged me with personal questions and has asked me out a few times. I have declined his invites, and my other responses have been limited. He also comments every time I post anything, and I typically ignore him. He just won't take the hint! Every time I see a message or any notification, I'm sick about it. I don't want to hurt his feelings, but I hardly know this person and don't have any interest in him romantically. What should I do?

Sincerely,

Inbox Overfloweth

Dear Inbox,

I've seen this happen to several of my young, attractive female connections on social media. They will often comment about unsavory "friends" or strangers messaging them with propositions (dating or sexual) even when they have boyfriends. More bad news is that it happens to middle-aged people as well. I've had a few occurrences in recent years between Facebook, Instagram, and even LinkedIn that have made me question what the actual heck people are thinking.

There's a reason the whole "Sliding into the DMs" (that's Direct Messages for the uninitiated) memes and GIFs are so popular and funny—they accurately portray the ineptitude of the person doing it. When I first joined Facebook ten years ago, it was to reconnect with college and high school friends and a few old coworkers. Now my friend list is full of every Tom, Dick, Harry, and Carrie I've encountered from all corners of my life. And while I do have a few stray folks that I have never met in person, I now tend to my friend requests like strange

weeds in a garden. Sure, they could be a rare flower, but I'm not about to risk the rest of my plants by letting them in.

Social media is kind of funny in that once people have access to your life online, they *think* they know everything about you—especially if you are open with your photos and commentary. And while social media can eerily detect a lot about human behavior (particularly for marketing and advertising purposes), the reality is that many of these people on your friend list don't know you at all—they only have a perception of you based on what you've created for public consumption. In that sense, you have to be aware of what you are putting out there. This is not putting blame on you should someone become aggressive, nasty, crude, or harassing in nature. However, if you are putting out a vibe that is thirsty for attention or lamenting your single status, you could garner some unwelcome reactions from your audience.

Here's the deal—a guy expressing his interest in you through Facebook is not any creepier than one chatting with you through a dating app. The fact that you aren't interested in him does not make him creepy. What would make him creepy is if you communicate your lack of interest and he continues to pursue you anyway. From the sound of it, you haven't done that yet because you "don't want to hurt his feelings." So, you can continue to ignore him, but it sounds like that's not working for you. Here are some other things you can do:

- Put him on a specific friend list that limits what he can see on your profile. I have a few lists set up and like to dump people in one I call "professional" for former coworkers and such. It limits a good amount of my profile. Another option is the default "restricted" list set up by Facebook, which limits almost all that can possibly be viewed. When you post a status, you will have to customize who can view it based on the lists, but the restricted list automatically blocks people. The idea behind this is that he will see less in his feed from you, and thus, "Out of sight, out of mind."
- Block him from messaging you.
- If all else fails, "unfriend" or block him altogether.
- If you go to extremes and do the latter, make sure your other social media profiles are set to private or block him on those so he can't keep tabs or contact you on other platforms.
- Going forward, be more selective with new friend requests from people you don't know very well or don't know at all.

While the aforementioned list is helpful, my top recommendation would be to establish clear boundaries by just saying no and telling him you aren't interested. Listen, you don't owe this guy any protection from hurt feelings—rejection is an unfortunate part of life. However, not addressing it only gives him false hope and creates unnecessary stress for you. And, even if you make up an excuse about having a boyfriend, your white lie could come back to haunt you if you talk about being single on your profile or if you have any mutual friends who accidentally slip up. When in doubt, honest communication is always the right choice. (SBS)

Stacey Rowe is a freelance writer based in Rochester. She can be found on Twitter and Instagram as @thestaceyrowe and at staceyrowe.com.

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