



# A salary below this amount is a dating deal-breaker for many Americans, survey shows — why you should talk money on your very first date

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Thinking about getting down on one knee this Valentine's Day? Don't make the big move without first being bold about your financial needs and goals.

Financial services company Western & Southern Financial Group [surveyed over 1,000 married Americans](#) about their financial triggers and found that 1-in-3 couples waited until after marriage to talk about important financial topics, with salary being the biggest topic they wished they'd talked about sooner.

## Why it's important to have the money talk

Kennedy, who has worked as an accountant and loan default counselor, divorced her husband after realizing they weren't financially compatible. The [divorce left her \\$25,000 in debt](#) and took her five years to financially recover from.

“Had we initiated more financial conversations in the beginning, we probably would have either decided early on that we were just not financially compatible to be in a relationship, let alone to be married.”

A 2022 [survey](#) from The Knot found that being secretive about finances or dishonest about how you're spending your money is one of the biggest deal-breakers in a relationship.

“When we look at the data, we see that not talking about money or money-related issues is one of the leading causes for divorce,” says Kennedy. “Initiating those conversations as early as possible and trying to get ahead of that curve is very important.”

The Western & Southern Financial Group’s [January survey](#) echoed some of The Knot's findings, with their survey showing the top three financial triggers for fights in relationships came down to spending habits, investments and salary.

Kennedy says she and her ex rarely spoke about money over the duration of their relationship and they always dealt with their finances separately. While Kennedy was concerned about the long-term financial goals, her ex typically focused on the present.

For example, once she’d suggested they might buy [life insurance](#) to ensure they could always provide for their children just in case. But her ex didn’t see the point of preparing for something that “may not happen.”

“I didn't feel that ... I would be able to stand my ground and be confident in what I knew about money and speak my piece,” Kennedy says. “So I didn't initiate any conversations.”

After the divorce, Kennedy says her financial responsibilities doubled while the household income was slashed in half — on top of the \$25,000 in debt she now had to repay. She made it work, but it was tough: She downsized her apartment, took public transit instead of buying a car and bartered for services like child care that were now harder to afford.

## **How to talk about money while dating**

You don’t necessarily need to ask a potential partner about their salary or [what their credit score is](#) on the very first date. But you can bring up more general topics around money, Kennedy says.

You want to get a sense of how someone views money rather than their habits, which don’t matter as much when you’re still getting to know someone. She suggests asking dates about their [relationship with money](#) and just seeing if they’re open to having conversations about it.

“In so many ways, money exists from the very beginning,” Kennedy adds. From deciding where you’ll spend your first date, to splitting the bill and

tipping — finance can find its way into your dating life without you even planning for it.

Once you're further into a relationship, you can start asking more serious questions. With Americans [feeling concerned about their financial health and salary needs](#), it's important not to shy away from difficult topics.

“Along with discussing upbringing, couples should discuss financial goals, financial planning, accepting each other's financial differences, different money management practices that are fair, and creating financial boundaries,” says Kennedy.

Some people may be eager to discuss money immediately, but others may need a little more time to engage. According to the new data, only 13% of married couples say they discussed salary and 6% talked about spending habits and debt, within their first month of dating.

One of the most important things you can do, Kennedy says, is to approach the conversation with empathy and an open mind.

“Give your partner time to show up,” she advises. “We all come from different backgrounds, different beliefs, we all have different experiences when it comes to money.”

## **Watch out for these red flags**

You can make it work with different money philosophies, but certain things should be non-negotiable. Kennedy warns you should be suspicious if your potential partner suddenly needs to borrow money or they consistently hide important financial details.

These red flags should be especially concerning if they seem as though they're trying to live beyond their means.

However, Kennedy adds that it's also important to be mindful of the current economic climate and how that may have impacted people's financial situations. Living with your parents longer than usual or not owning a car and taking public transportation instead aren't necessarily indicators of financial instability.

In fact, more and more adults aged 18 to 34 are [living with their parents](#) in the midst of a rapidly rising cost of living.

But if your financial aspirations and behaviors are completely out of sync, you might need to make the hard call and end the relationship.

“It is essential to know that some financial goals and habits can be seen as deal-breakers, which is OK,” Kennedy says. “You and your partner will not always agree on everything, but that doesn't mean you have to conform to values that go against your financial morals.”