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How To Know If You're Really In Love Or Stuck In A 'Virtual' Relationship

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© getty 11 Signs Your Long-Distance Relationship Only Exists Online (& What To Do About It)

With technology, it's so easy to meet and communicate with people all over the world, which explains why so many singles of all ages end up in "virtual" long-distance relationships.

When you're feeling lonely and looking for love, a flirty message from someone far away can lift your

spirits like nothing else. One thing leads to another and the connection blossoms into a strong emotional bond.

Suddenly, you find yourself in a long-distance relationship, where you primarily rely on text messages, social media, Skype and other virtual platforms to stay connected.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying an online relationship. The intimacy, caring and support that comes from them can be satisfying, depending on what your needs are.

Sometimes, creating intimacy is actually easier knowing that the distance between you keeps you safe. After all, what are the chances you'll really meet that far away guy who lives in another state or country?

For the independent woman who fears losing her freedom, an online-only, long-distance relationship can actually work well.

In a long-distance relationship, you can easily protect your free time and limit what you share with your partner. From a distance, he won't ask you to join him at events or hang out watching TV. You've probably known of couples who see each other a few times a year for long weekends and holidays and love this arrangement.

Love at a distance is also incredibly romantic. Planning your first meeting and imagining what that will be like. Picturing yourself in his arms or meeting his family and friends. This is the stuff fairytales are made of. When a get together like this is not likely, it can all seem absolutely perfect as you plot out every detail in your mind.

A relationship in real life never measures up to a virtual one because most of the thrill is in your head. The fantasy is far more enjoyable because it excludes the mundane stuff that is part of a real-life relationship.

The distance also reduces the risk of feeling judged, since you don't spend time in person or around others. This is why an online love affair feels safer than a real one.

The geographic separation eliminates pressure, too. If you're just texting, it doesn't matter what your hair or makeup look like or what you're wearing. Some people engage in virtual relationships because they crave variety or more attention, but don't want to risk physically cheating on a partner.

Trouble arises as feelings grow — you fall in love and decide you want to move your long-distance relationship offline and into real life.

If your man was just killing time or cheating without *physically* cheating, he won't want to take things to the next level and meet or spend quality time together.

Not everyone can handle a full-fledged relationship, and that's why they seek virtual connections instead. The responsibility of a relationship is just too much for some guys. They don't carve time out to see you, vacation with you or be there for special events.

They like things just as they are, feeling more in control and safer behind technology.

As a woman falls deeply in love with her far away guy, she becomes intensely involved and attached. A desire for even more sets in. Not being able to take things to the next level and enjoy physical intimacy causes frustration, angst, and longing that simply can't be satisfied by this online affair.

If you are serious about finding true love, a virtual, long-distance relationship will not work for a number of reasons.

- The distance makes it expensive to see each other.
- You may not have enough vacation time to visit as much as you want.
- Ultimately, one of you will have to move to be together.
- There may be cultural differences.
- If he lives outside your country, there may be visa issues and other legal concerns.

- You'll never know how real the chemistry is without being there to use all your senses — seeing his body language and holding eye contact, the electricity of his touch, and how he smells of soap, shampoo, or shaving lotion.
- He'll never kiss you, hold your hand, or make love to you in real life.

Here are 11 signs you're stuck in a "virtual" long-distance relationship that isn't going anywhere:

- You've been texting/talking for months, but have never met (even if you aren't that far apart)
- You may have met once or twice, but his time to spend with you is limited. Texting, Skype, or Facetime fit better with his schedule.
- He says he wants to see you, but he has loads of excuses for why he can't right now. (Illness, work, family needs, demanding boss, etc.)
- You stalk him on social media and spend more time texting or talking to him on the phone, than on anything else going on in your real life.
- He makes plans with you and enjoys discussing details, but always cancels.
- He always pushes off planning a trip or seeing you into the future.
- Even if you fly to meet each other for a fabulous getaway, you still don't know who he really is or what he's like when the chips are down — important details for healthy, lasting love.

- He finds it easier to share his thoughts and express himself by text versus talking on the phone or in person. The written word, carefully chosen, can feel more meaningful vs. speaking naturally in the spur of the moment.
- You'd rather wait around to text or talk to him than spend time with your friends or family.
- He loves to text all day, but might not have time to talk at night. (This can be a sign he's in another relationship.)
- You text during the day and talk at night, giving up the rest of your life and putting off other activities and responsibilities.

Once you recognize you are in an online-only relationship and want more, you can either transition it to real life — or move on to find true love.

First, build up your self-esteem. Know you are worthy of having the real thing, and get frank with yourself about this relationship. Then, insist on setting a date with him for spending time together face-to-face. Let him know this is the end of the line and you are very serious about your request.

Accept no excuses and give no second chances. If he truly loves you and wants to be with you, a quality man will do what it takes so he doesn't lose you. Realize that, if he can't find a way to see you, it automatically makes him the wrong man.

Decide you will end the long-distance relationship if he cannot visit, meet you somewhere or keep his word. Don't bother with idle threats — you must follow through and keep your word for your own good! Set up your support system to keep you accountable about making this real or walking away should he disappoint you one last time.

Plan for the aftermath in case things don't work out, such as indulging in plenty of self-care: getting a massage, Reiki healing, taking cleansing baths with Epsom salts, and working out or doing yoga. You can also watch chick-flicks, read a good book, and hang out with your girlfriends.

And if you discover that you're stuck in a virtual, long-distance relationship that's going nowhere, it's time to end things. Then, once you feel ready to start dating again, look *locally* for love. A woman who is serious about finding lasting love with the right man knows her chances are far better with a geographically desirable guy.

For nearly twenty years, Ronnie Ann Ryan has been a dating coach for women who helps successful single women with hot careers (but a chilly love life) find lasting love. For more savvy tips, watch her free webinar, 5 Astonishingly Simple Ways to Find "The One."