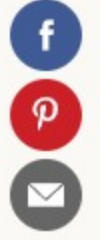


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# What IsBreadcrumbing? A Relationship Expert Explains



Look out for these four warning signs.

By [Megan Beauchamp](#) | Updated on October 03, 2023 09:20AM  
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— IN THIS ARTICLE —

- 01 [The Red Flags](#)
- 02 [The Reasons](#)
- 03 [The Next Steps](#)

You've probably heard of "ghosting" and "gaslighting"—two popular dating terms in the mainstream lexicon due to the prevalence of [dating apps](#) like Tinder and Bumble. But what about "breadcrumbing?"

According to Kelly Campbell, Ph.D., breadcrumbing "is leading someone on romantically using online or electronic forums (think: social media or [texting](#)) to keep someone's interest in you, even if you never intend to become romantically involved with them." It's essentially the act of sending out flirtatious, but non-committal, social signals (i.e. "breadcrumbs") in order to lure a romantic partner in without expending much effort. In other words, it's an [emotionally manipulative](#) tactic designed to make someone dependent on you (or vice versa, depending on the relationship dynamic).

### MEET THE EXPERT

[Kelly Campbell](#), Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at California State University, San Bernardino. Her research examines instant connections among friends and romantic partners, how being in love helps and/or hinders performance across domains (e.g., athletics, creativity), infidelity, and catfishing (online romantic deception).

To gain further insight into this latest phenomenon, we asked Campbell to break down the psychology behind breadcrumbing in relationships—including the red flags to watch out for, the reasoning behind the manipulative behavior, and how to navigate the next steps. Read on to learn more.

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## Breadcrumbing Red Flags

Unfortunately, many people often don't know they're being breadcrumbing until they've been hurt and deceived. To prevent this from happening to you, Campbell highlights four red flags to look out for when dating online.

- 1. The person you're interested in is less invested in getting together than you are.** "[Breadcrumbers] make plans with you but cancel or don't show up, and they seem too busy for you," explains Campbell. "They might even go absent for periods of time."
- 2. You never know where you stand with them.** According to Campbell, breadcrumbers "are sporadic, inconsistent, and unpredictable in their expression of interest" in you.
- 3. They seem warm toward you but then turn cold.** For instance, "they take a long time to respond to your messages," offers Campbell as an example of this behavior.
- 4. You can't understand or explain their actions.** "You are often left confused or frustrated after interacting with them," Campbell elaborates.

## The Reasons Behind Breadcrumbing

According to Campbell, while the reasons behind breadcrumbing can vary from person to person, people typically engage in breadcrumbing "because their self-esteem is impacted by how much attention they can secure from others." She further explains that "The more interest from others they maintain, the better they feel about themselves." What's more, these are often people who need continuous validation as "they don't feel comfortable or confident unless they get constant reassurance from others that they are worthy or valuable," Campbell shares.

Another reason? Breadcrumbers are often narcissistic. "Often, these individuals have a personality characterized by narcissism, as well as a game-playing, shallow approach to relationships," Campbell observes. "They don't feel guilty about manipulating others and playing with people's emotions." Lastly, and arguably the most shocking, some breadcrumbers "are already in a relationship with someone yet are still seeking attention from others," Campbell divulges.









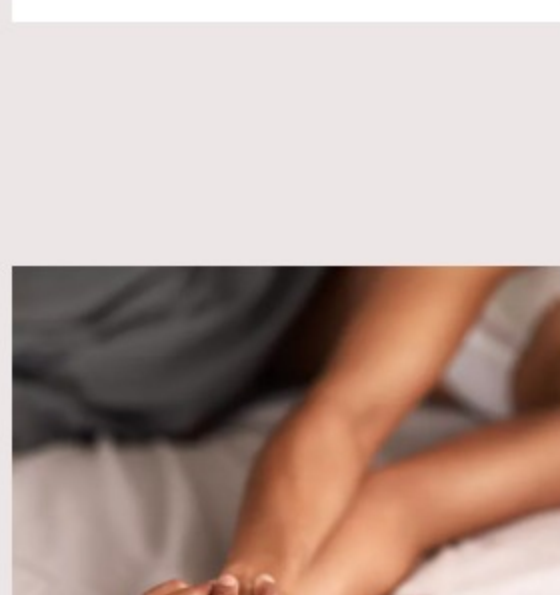
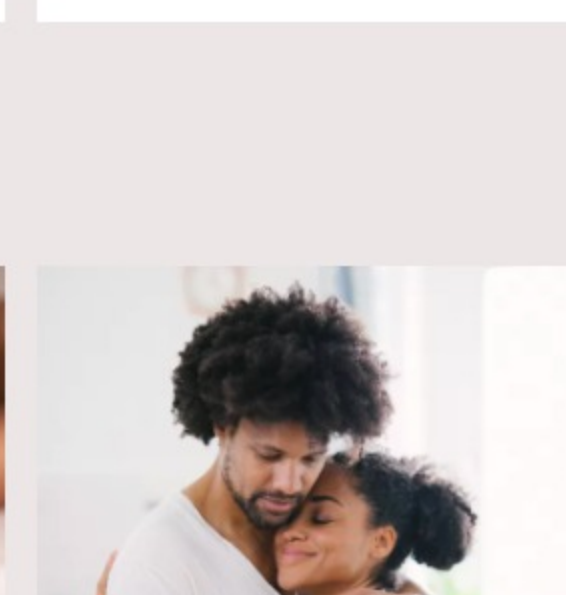
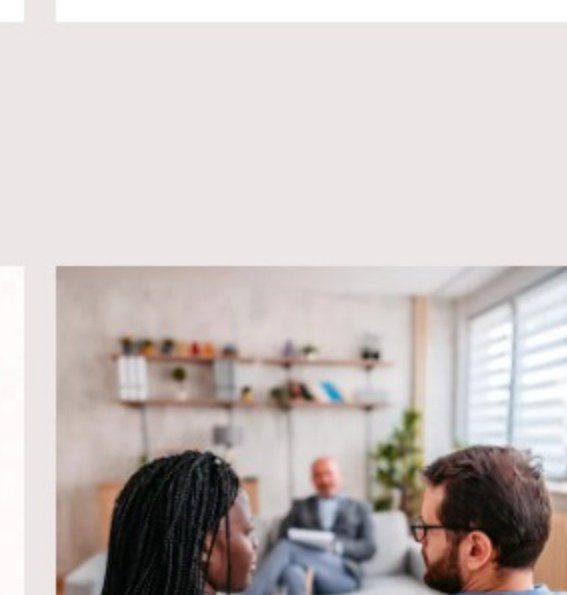
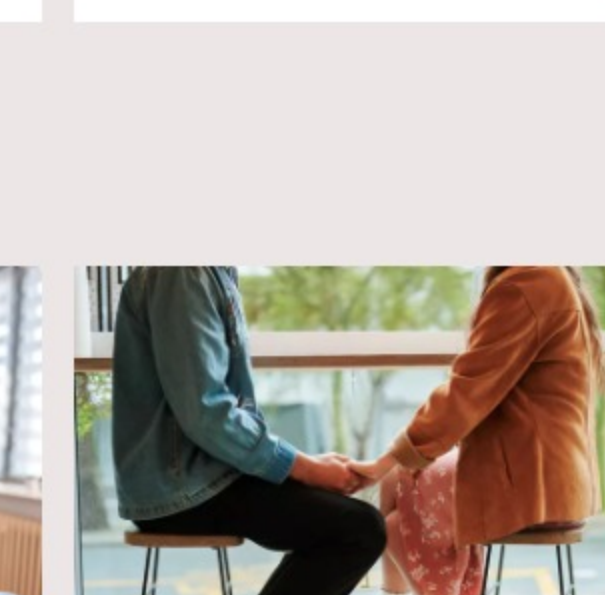
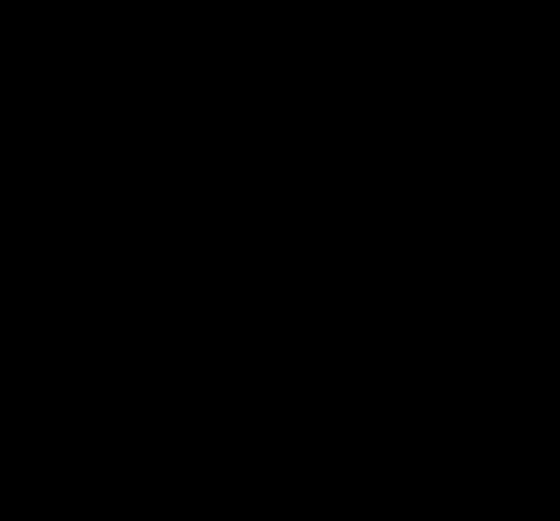
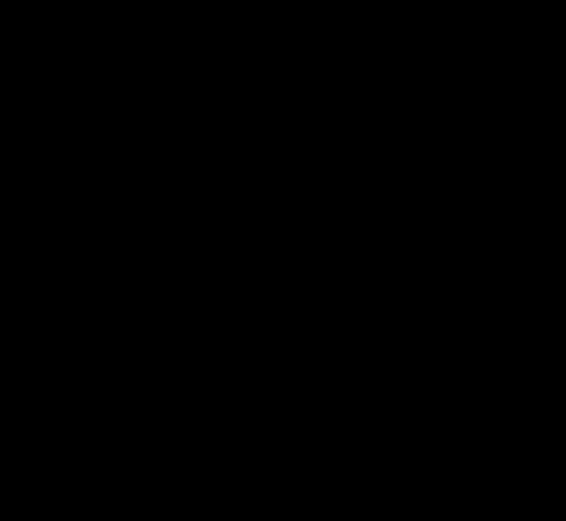
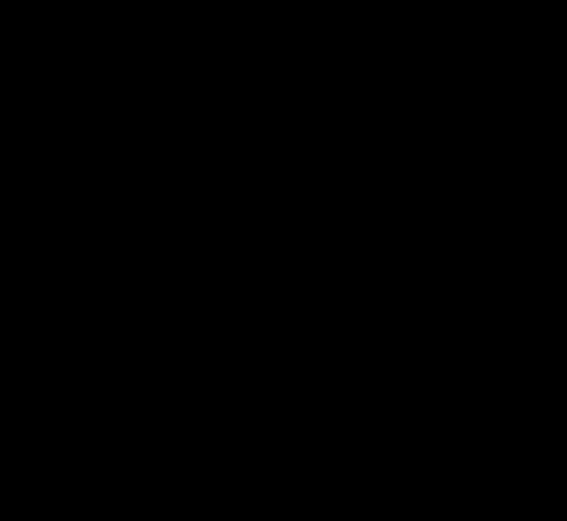
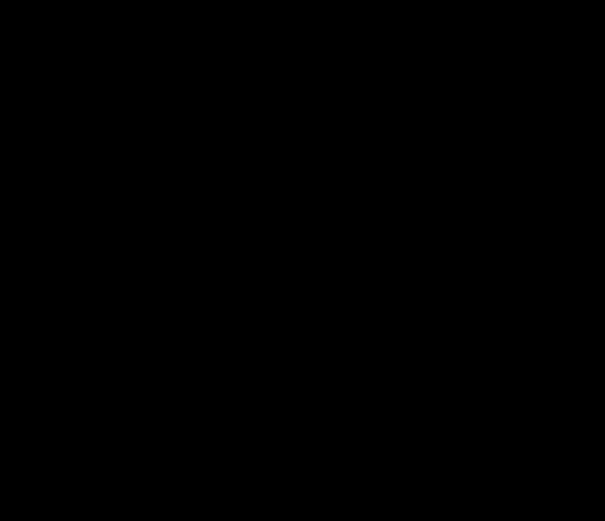
## What to Do If You've Been Breadcrumbed

First and foremost, "You set the example for how others should treat you, so don't tolerate poor treatment," Campbell explains. "You deserve someone who is willing to give you the same amount of attention you are willing to invest." With that in mind, if you believe you are being breadcrumbing, consider what your [boundaries](#) are and then take action: You'll likely want to unmatch this person on the app in question and block their phone number, if you've been in contact that way.

Working on yourself is also a solution, says Campbell. You can augment your [self-esteem](#) by engaging in activities that you excel at and by treating yourself kindly. "Engage in self-care, use positive self-talk," Campbell advises. Lastly, think about what it would mean for you to date someone who is available. You can do this by defining what you feel you deserve in a healthy relationship, as setting these guidelines for yourself will help you seek out partners who are a better match for what you desire.

UP NEXT: [What Is Gaslighting in a Relationship? These Are the Warning Signs to Look For](#)

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