

# Life, Work & Family

Monthly work/life news for UAW-Represented DaimlerChrysler Workers

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## The Dating Game Has Strict Rules at Work

"If you're going to play the game properly, you'd better know every rule." - former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Texas)

Statistics tell us that nearly half of today's married couples met at work. But statistics don't tell us about office disruptions caused by relationships that didn't work out.

As social life and work life intertwine, we need to practice the defensive arts of good manners and etiquette. Among other things, courtesy is discreet - and when it comes to dating in the workplace, discretion is the better part of survival. The less you bring your personal relationship to work, the less it will harm your career.

If you're lucky, your company has a written dating policy. Unfortunately, most offices don't. Dating policies are designed to protect everyone against discomfort and legal liability.

If you're single, you should become familiar with your employer's policy - before a specific need arises. Couples also must be aware of dating policies when they begin relationships.

Some policies require that you tell management about your relationship, especially when people of unequal ranks are concerned. Some policies may require that one partner transfer to a new department if both partners work in the same department. Others require partners to sign a contract of consent, agreeing not to bring suit against the company or each other if the relationship sours.

If your company has no formal policy, take an objective look at the corporate culture. The only way to survive, much less thrive, in any company is to learn to function within the organization according to its rules, many of which are unwritten.

No matter what your corporate culture is, the first rule of workplace romances is don't advertise it. You can be sure that coworkers and top brass alike will be a lot more tolerant of the relationship if they don't feel awkward about it.

Not only should you refrain from discussing your relationship with anyone in the office, your guard should go up if someone asks you about it, especially when your relationship is new. You might respond to such questions by saying, "Why would you ask me that?"

Your professional behavior will defend you against office gossip. And if you decide to end the romance in its formative stage, you'll be glad you never discussed it with anyone.

There are ethical considerations as well: Flaunting an office romance invites gossip about your private life, and your coworkers' chatting can infringe on time and energy owed to the company. If you cause yourself to

be a topic of conversation, leading others to lose focus on work, you're cheating the company of its time and resources.

### **Asking for a Date**

At the beginning of any romance, prudence cautions us against rushing in. It's all the more so in office romances. Be careful that the client or customer you invite for a date won't think you're being aggressive. Adopt a bashful manner, and get some advance sense of whether your dating attentions will be welcome. Nobody should be blindsided with an invitation for a date. Is there already a friendly professional rapport? Do eye contact and smiles come easily? That could be an auspicious beginning. Go ahead. Invite the person for a date. Make it for something fun and nonthreatening, such as a sports event or Sunday brunch at a friend's home. Daylight fosters ease and comfort. Keep the invitation innocent.

If you're turned down, you'll need to rely on your instincts and best judgment to tell you whether to ask again. People do make plans, and it's possible something conflicted with your invitation.

But don't confuse dating with sales and attempt to wear down a person with your persistence. Your idea of "friendly persuasion" might be someone else's idea of sexual harassment. Play it cool. Perceptions are reality. We can't argue with how a person feels - if someone feels harassed, that's a disaster waiting to happen. Work life gets especially dicey when a supervisor dates a subordinate. Even when both people are completely professional, the supervisor will likely be viewed as playing favorites, and the subordinate's professional contributions will be diminished or dismissed.

Even if the relationship dies, those perceptions will live on. Both parties may be remembered for the affair rather than for any business accomplishments. Think about it: If someone asks you for the first thing that comes to mind about the Clinton presidency, you'll probably name Monica Lewinsky.

But suppose your date blossoms into something wonderful and likely to last. However, your office frowns on dating among coworkers. In such a case, your choices may include one partner transferring departments or finding a new job outside the company. These choices shouldn't be made in a vacuum - they affect not only two individuals, but also the department and the company.

After your relationship has stood the test of some time (let's say three months), it's a good idea to speak confidentially to your supervisor or human resources person about your options. No company wants to lose good people, especially when they're doing their best to play by its rules.

### **Here are some don'ts to help you steer clear of romantic disasters at work:**

- Don't date someone you have trouble working with. You need to feel secure about a work relationship before you take it to another level.
- Don't carry out your courtship on company time. Everybody loves a lover - for about five minutes. Then those romantic rituals (frequent trips past each other's desks, instant messaging all day long, "I just wanted to say I love you" phone calls) become sophomoric intrusions on the workplace.
- Don't stay at office parties later than 6 p.m., especially if you've paired up with a coworker. Lingering at a party's end signals that you're inviting further partying. If you leave late with someone, tongues will wag about how you spent the rest of the evening, even if you just walked to the subway together and went your separate ways. Never forget that when it comes to office parties, the emphasis belongs on the "office," not the "party."
- Don't discuss troubles between you and your spouse or lover. Don't count on people keeping secrets. People switch alliances more often than we might think, and your current lover may end up being your confidante's next conquest. If you're troubled about a relationship, talk to a trustworthy friend whom you don't work with or invest in a professional counselor.
- Don't repeat risqué stories or jokes. People might see them as come-ons or simply embarrassing. Besides, although few will express their discomfort and disapproval, you may end up excluded from important projects, meetings and social events for reasons you're never told.
- Don't talk about your body, especially anything you feel needs expansion or reduction. That's like telling someone not to think about the color blue - at that point, blue becomes the only thing he can think of. You might be talking about the surgical safety of breast augmentation, but you can be sure that all the other

person can think about is your chest. That can sound like a come-on, or at least create a sexually uncomfortable atmosphere.

- Don't go bar-hopping with coworkers of the opposite gender. You're just asking for morning-after gossip, especially when the tongue-loosening effects of alcohol are stirred into the mix.
- Don't discuss sexual experiences with coworkers. It's bad manners because such confessions rarely are comfortable conversations, yet the listener seldom dares say, "That's really a whole lot more than I want to hear." Also, don't count on your secrets staying secret.
- Don't even think about dating someone who's married.
- Don't ever say to a coworker, "If I weren't involved with someone, I could get into a lot of trouble with you." Sounds corny, but variations on this theme are alive and well. Although it might be said without guile, you don't want to learn later that you seemingly made a pass at someone.
- Don't indulge in PDAs - "public displays of affection," not handheld computers. That goes for long conversations during work; long lunches or lunches taken at irregular hours; and walking into work together in the morning, bleary-eyed. If you're dating someone in the office, don't be seen kissing, hugging or casting suggestive glances. Such sights distract and stop work from progressing as it should.

While some office romances may go undiscovered, what's more likely is that office lovebirds may just have their heads in the clouds. Keep in mind that even when nothing's happening, offices are full of gossip. So keep cause for gossip to a minimum. At the very least, remain mum about those early casual dates. It's your private business, and you should keep it private. Your relationship may not last. If it doesn't, you'll still have to work with someone who once was your lover, and you'll be glad you were discreet.

*Source: Mitchell, M. (n.d.). The Dating Game Has Strict Rules at Work. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from the Epectech database.*

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## Enjoying Stress-Free Summer Activities

It's summertime, school is out, and many families are at their wit's end about how to fill three months of their children's free time. Images of summertime are usually cast in a light of hot, lazy, relaxing days by a lake, but the reality for most working families is the struggle to balance the demands of adult work schedules with providing safe activities for children. This dilemma often results in hectic, stress-filled days comparable to those during the school year. While summer camp is an option for some, the cost of day and overnight camps can be too expensive for many families' budgets. Structured activities are beneficial, but parents and caregivers should also keep in mind the advantages of unstructured time for children.

So what do we do to keep young children busy, yet also allow them to enjoy the summer months? Whether your child is a preschooler or school-age, a wealth of opportunities for fun, educational, and even relaxing activities are possible. Here are some tips that may be useful for families and caregivers:

### Visit the Library

Until recently, libraries offered little or nothing for children below the age of three, but in the past few years, many have introduced programs for toddlers. Children and adults can participate in activities that may include reading aloud, storytelling, fingerplays, rhymes, and songs. Preschoolers usually enjoy the group activities offered by libraries, where they can participate in puppet shows and arts and crafts activities. For elementary school children, there are variations of the read-alouds and storytelling hours that often include discussions and presentations by the children themselves, as well as summer reading programs. Many public libraries also offer training courses for children in using different software or educational programs.



## Discover Geography

What makes a place special? What are the physical characteristics of your hometown? Take children for a walk around your neighborhood and look at what makes it unique. Point out how it is similar to other places you have been and how it is different. If you live near a park, a lake, a river, a stream or a creek, take your children there and spend time talking about its uses. Read stories about distant places with children or sing songs to teach geography, for example "Home on the Range" or "California, Here I Come." Make a wish list of places you would like to visit with your child. Look them up on a map and plan a trip there--real or pretend.

### View and Create Collections

Go to a children's museum to view hands-on exhibits or suggest that your children start a "collection" and build their own museum. They can collect natural materials, such as acorns and leaves from a local park or sea shells from the beach.

## Nature's Best

Older children can learn about weather by using a map to look up the temperature of cities around the world and discovering how hot each gets in the summer. Watch cloud formations and imagine. Do the shapes look like horses, ducks or other animals?

At night, children can collect fireflies in jars, or depending on their age, camp out in a tent in the back yard. Create a treasure map for children to find hidden treats in the yard. Read about your state bird and state flower, and if possible, bicycle ride to a nearby park to find them.

## Use Community Resources

Watch for special events, such as free outdoor music festivals or concerts. Many communities host evening concerts in local parks--pack a picnic dinner and enjoy time with your family. People are resources too--collectors, painters, and backyard naturalists may live in your neighborhood, eager to share their knowledge with children.

## Rainy Day Activities

Summertime often brings thunderclouds. On days when outdoor activities are not possible, you can share family history and photos with your children. Pull out the old videotapes of past family gatherings and events. Prepare an indoor picnic with your child or cook dinner together.

Whatever the activity, children can enjoy and appreciate the summer months in ways that are both educational and stress-reducing for all involved.

*Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children*

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## Benefits for Grandchildren

More and more parents are finding themselves raising grandchildren. Social Security will pay benefits to grandchildren if benefits are not payable on the work record of a parent.

### Grandchildren

If a child is not receiving benefits from a parent when the grandparent retires, becomes disabled, or dies, the grandchild may then be able to qualify for benefits if



certain conditions are met. Generally, the biological parents of the child must be deceased or disabled, or the grandchild must be legally adopted by the grandparent.

In addition, the grandchild must have begun living with the grandparent before age 18 and received at least one half of his or her support from the grandparent for the year before the month the grandparent became entitled to retirement or disability insurance benefits, or died. Also, the natural parent(s) of the child must not be making regular contributions to his or her support.

If the grandchild was born during the one-year period, the grandparent must have lived with and provided at least one-half of the child's support for substantially all of the period from the date of birth to the month the grandparent became entitled to benefits.

The grandchild may qualify for benefits under these circumstances, even if he or she is a step-grandchild.

However, if the grandparents are already receiving benefits, they would need to adopt the child for it to qualify for benefits.

Social Security has a toll-free number that operates from 7AM to 7PM, Monday to Friday: **1-800-772-1213** If you have a touch-tone phone, recorded information and services are available 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call our toll-free "TTY" number, **1-800-325-0778**, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Monday through Friday. Please have your Social Security number handy when you call us.

*Source: Social Security Administration*