

A HALACHIC GUIDE TO GETTING +
GIVING **SHIDDUCH** INFORMATION

When Someone's Life Is in *Your Hands*



WHAT YOU MUST SAY + WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T SAY
BY RABBI MOSHE MORDECHAI LOWY

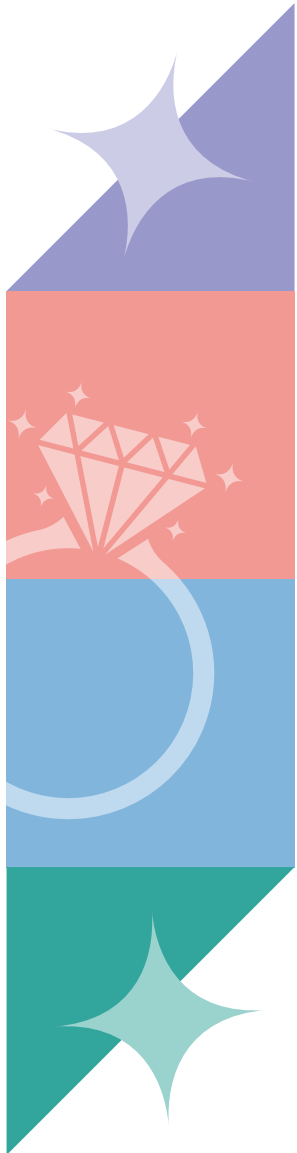
*Dedicated as a zechus for shidduchim in our
family and in all of Klal Yisroel*

Joel and Miriam Gold and Family

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THE SHMIRAS HALOSHON SHAILA HOTLINE

To say or not to say? Whether it is for a shidduch, a job referral, or just among family or friends, the wrong words can do irreparable harm. And sometimes, so can silence. Our Shaila Hotline puts you in contact with expert rabbonim so that before you speak, you can be sure. Evenings from 9:00 to 10:30 pm.

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A word, a phrase, even just “making a face,” can change the course of two people’s lives.

Sometimes that’s all it takes to destroy what might have been a wonderful match, and create an impression that sticks to a young man or woman for years.

Everyone in the community is a potential provider of *shidduch* information.

Your words can cause a promising *shidduch* to be abandoned, while withholding crucial information could allow a *shidduch* to proceed that can lead to great pain. So every one of us has to learn what he or she is allowed to say—and how and when to say it.

PLEASE NOTE

Negative information given within the halachic category of “to’eles”—constructive purpose—for a *shidduch*, when spoken the way the Torah prescribes, is not loshon hora. The Torah is not “allowing” loshon hora for the purpose of a *shidduch*. It is defining this type of speech as something completely separate from loshon hora.



The Chofetz Chaim said that when it comes to *shidduch* information, people often speak up when they should be quiet, and remain silent when they should speak up. The *satan*, he explains, works both sides of the fence. In people who have important information that needs to be passed on, the *satan* stirs such a dread of speaking loshon hora that they hold their tongues.

On the other hand, he encourages people who are eager to transmit fleeting negative impressions by persuading them that they’re observing the mitzvah of “Do not stand by as your fellow’s blood is shed.”



Ways to Inquire

ASKING QUESTIONS FOR A POTENTIAL SHIDDUCH

In investigating a potential *shidduch* you're required to say, "I'm asking you for this information about X because someone is considering a *shidduch* with him/her." You have to put it up front even if you feel that this might make your source sugarcoat or hide facts that you need to know.

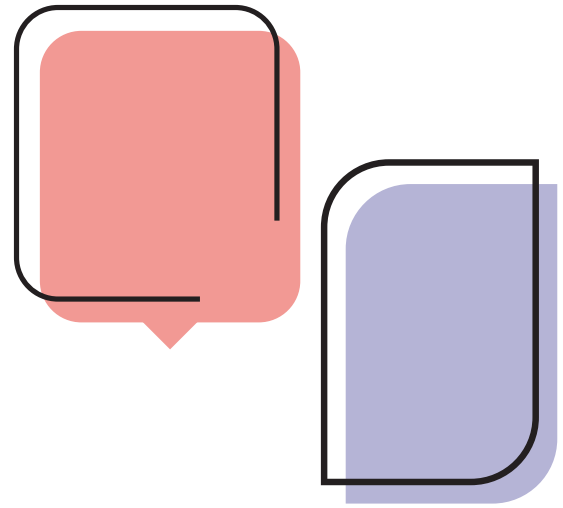
There are two reasons for this:

CORRECT INTENT

One is so that neither the person asking nor the person answering questions will be guilty of speaking *loshon hora*. Certain information may be divulged only when the intent is for *shidduch* purposes; otherwise the person giving information would be guilty of the sin of *loshon hora*, and the person requesting information would be guilty of the sin of "Do not place a stumbling block before a blind person."

WHAT TO SAY, WHAT NOT TO SAY

It is also so that the person who answers will know how to phrase his answer in a way that meets the requirements of speaking *l'to'eles*—for a constructive purpose.



Ways to Respond

ANSWERING SHIDDUCH-RELATED INQUIRIES

Four questions to ask yourself before giving information:

1. How well do I really know the person?
2. How do I personally feel about the person?
3. What is the source of my information?
4. What will happen to this information after I disclose it?

Five Rules of To'eles

1

Think your response through carefully.

Are you sure that the information you're about to share is accurate? This requires careful consideration, since many of our impressions of other people are based on secondhand, unconfirmed information.

2

Don't exaggerate.

Say only what you know to be 100% true. Don't exaggerate or embellish. There's a big difference between saying "He's quiet" and saying "He's very quiet." Even one word of exaggeration is forbidden, because it's slander.

To avoid overstating, imagine that someone is asking about YOU, and that it's your own future that's at stake. If you do that, you'll surely pay close attention to the way you present any negative information, giving it no more weight than absolutely necessary.

3

Transmit the information with the express purpose of aiding a shidduch.

If you have something negative to say, be sure you're saying it for the to'eles of helping with a shidduch inquiry. If you dislike the person you're asked about, you have to remove these feelings of dislike from your heart, at least temporarily, so that you can pass on important negative information with only the right intention (l'to'eles). If you can't get yourself to do this, refer the person asking you for information to someone else, someone who knows what you know but doesn't dislike the person you're being asked about.

This rule applies to anyone you may dislike even a little bit. Figure out what's motivating when you feel you have to pass on negative information. Avoid giving information about a person you yourself dated.

5

4

Pass on the information in the least harmful way possible.

If this shidduch needs to be stopped, is there any way of stopping it without having to provide damaging details? Maybe “I don’t think this particular shidduch is for you” would work. If the inquirer persists, saying, “Maybe I’ll want the shidduch anyway. Please give me more details. I don’t want you to be the judge,” only then may you pass on the information you have (provided that the other conditions are met); and even then, keep negative information to the absolute minimum necessary. If, after you transmit a small part of the information, the person requesting the information decides not to pursue the shidduch, then stop, because more information has no further to’eles (constructive purpose).

Passing on negative information risks reducing another person’s chance of getting married, and can affect that person’s reputation and life. So try your best to hold back potentially harmful details if at all possible.

5

Weigh the amount of harm your information may cause against any benefit that can come from revealing it.

If you know that the person you’re confiding the information to is indiscreet and will spread the details, halachah forbids you to say it. If the information is so serious that you feel the shidduch shouldn’t proceed, get someone respected by the family to simply advise strongly against the match.

It’s a good habit to tell anyone to whom you’re relating information not to spread the information further. The worst thing about loshon hora is the way it can cause fights. If through transmitting what you know a fight will result, you must ask a rav who is an expert in the laws of Shmiras Haloshon how to pass along the critical information: what words to use, or through whom to get it done.

What Information Is Relevant?

WHAT IS RELEVANT INFORMATION THAT NEEDS TO BE REPORTED?

Expert judgment is often needed to determine whether it's necessary to mention a particular quality. Even a tinge of a problem can be enough to derail a *shidduch*; yet a problem that looms large in your mind may not be a problem at all to a potential spouse.

For example, if you were raised in a calm, quiet home, then what to you might seem to be a show of anger or temper might to the couple involved be in the normal range of behavior. On the other hand, there's a level of anger significant enough to influence a person's ability to establish a peaceful home.

This is anger that needs to be reported.

The question is, where does the line between “personality” and “problem-causing anger” lie? Someone who gets angry easily at employees may be perfectly calm and relaxed at home. Someone who often gets angry at his family might be on his best behavior at work.

And then, keep in mind the other party in the potential *shidduch*. Someone who is impatient with slowness, for instance, will not present a problem to a potential partner whose personality leans toward thinking and acting quickly.



Bottom line: Whenever you're unsure how to answer a request for *shidduch* information, consult a *rav* who has expertise in this sensitive area.

When you're the one collecting *shidduch* information, you have to take into consideration the personality of the person who's responding to your inquiry. From what perspective is he/she making the assessment?

By no means may a *shidduch* inquiry open the door for any and all types of information to flow back and forth between those concerned.

Three Categories of Information

CATEGORY 1

Objective Essential Information

Objective, essential information is in the category of “Do not stand by as your fellow’s blood is shed.” This means that as long as the five rules of *to’eles* are met, such information **has to be passed on**.

But people are often driven to give too much negative information because they think that *all* information falls into this category. Be aware that holding back negative information does *not* always violate the negative commandment of “Do not stand by as your fellow’s blood is shed.”

The **only** faults this *lav* (negative commandment) covers are ones that are detrimental to establishing a Jewish home, a happy marriage and a wholesome relationship: seriously flawed character traits, lack of *tznius* or other halachic imperatives, and definable health or emotional problems.

You have to volunteer Category 1 information even if you aren’t asked.

CATEGORY 2

Subjective Essential Information

Is he smart? Is she personable? Category 2 information covers *middos*, commitment to learning, intelligence, family, and age—information that’s important, but not necessarily crucial. In this category you may not volunteer negative information; **but you must always tell the truth if asked**.

When considering whether to pass on negative information, ask yourself whether this quality would be detrimental to the establishment of a happy, wholesome Jewish home. If the answer to that question isn’t clear, it is better not to inform anyone of it until you check with a *rav*.

CATEGORY 3

Unique Personal Preferences

Many minor issues don’t stand in the way of a good marriage. Maybe a woman says she won’t consider anyone who doesn’t share her love of music; withholding the fact that a potential spouse has no taste for music doesn’t violate “Do not stand by as your fellow’s blood is shed.”

But if asked, you may answer truthfully. Doing so does not violate “Do not be a gossipmonger” even if the information may be detrimental to the *shidduch*, since it is being offered for *to’eles* (a constructive purpose). Under no circumstances may a person lie; but when choosing not to answer in the belief that the *shidduch* might be successful in spite of this particular piece of information, you have not violated the commandment of “Do not stand by as your fellow’s blood is shed.”

Sources of Information

FIRSTHAND OR SECONDHAND INFORMATION

Is information you're about to offer known to you personally, or is it secondhand information, based on hearsay? Secondhand information is possibly inaccurate and potentially dangerous.

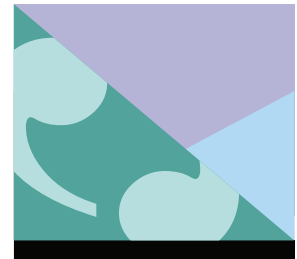
If it's impossible to verify the secondhand information, and all five conditions of relaying information have been met, you may convey it with a clearly expressed warning that it is based on hearsay, and you don't know personally whether or not it's true.

WHEN AND HOW TO PASS ON SECONDHAND INFORMATION

You might have secondhand information that's serious and relevant to a couple's future together. In that case, the Torah requires you to expend time and effort to verify the truth of the information for yourself. "Do not stand by while your fellow's blood is shed" means that it's essential to check out and report information that could present serious problems in a marriage. Information gained from personal experience is ideal, but even with firsthand knowledge, be very careful. Analyze the reason for your opinion. Is it based on long-term acquaintance, or on a quick first impression? A recent encounter, or one of five years ago?

OPINION VS. FACTS IN "ARMCHAIR PSYCHOLOGY"

Character assessments are important and useful if a person is looking for a spouse with a certain personality trait—for instance, outgoing and sociable, or serious, or warmhearted. Again, be careful! Labels like "unfriendly" and "disorganized" can be based on vague impressions with few real facts to go by, yet they can and do derail potential *shidduchim*.



The Chofetz Chaim says that the habit of labeling people and disclosing those labels to others does immeasurable harm. Instead, develop the habit of reporting facts without rendering judgment or pinning on labels.

**“Opinions are
by nature subjective”**

Even when an assessment is halachically permitted, it should never be passed along as a factual, definitive description of another person's character. Always keep in mind that opinions are subjective, and that humans are complex beings.

When it comes to perceptions of other people, few of us pause to differentiate between fact and opinion. Facts are better than opinions; but even among facts, not everything may be reported.

For example, if there is a medical or an emotional problem that would undermine the marriage, then the information should be passed along after meeting the five requirements for answering an inquiry. But this doesn't mean that every medical or emotional problem is relevant. Many couples live in harmony in spite of a medical or emotional flaw in one or the other. Because such information can derail a potential *shidduch*, **even in cases where halachah permits or obligates you to convey negative information, halachah outlines how to do it. You need the guidance of a *rav* before passing on the information.**

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

If you know something about a *shalom bayis* problem or a health problem that no one else in the community is aware of, you are **not allowed to divulge this secret**. You may hint at a problem by saying, "I don't think the *shidduch* would be right for you," without going into detail. If this information falls into Category **1** you're obligated to try to stop the *shidduch*, but **without revealing the confidential information**.

WHEN THE COUPLE IS ALREADY ENGAGED

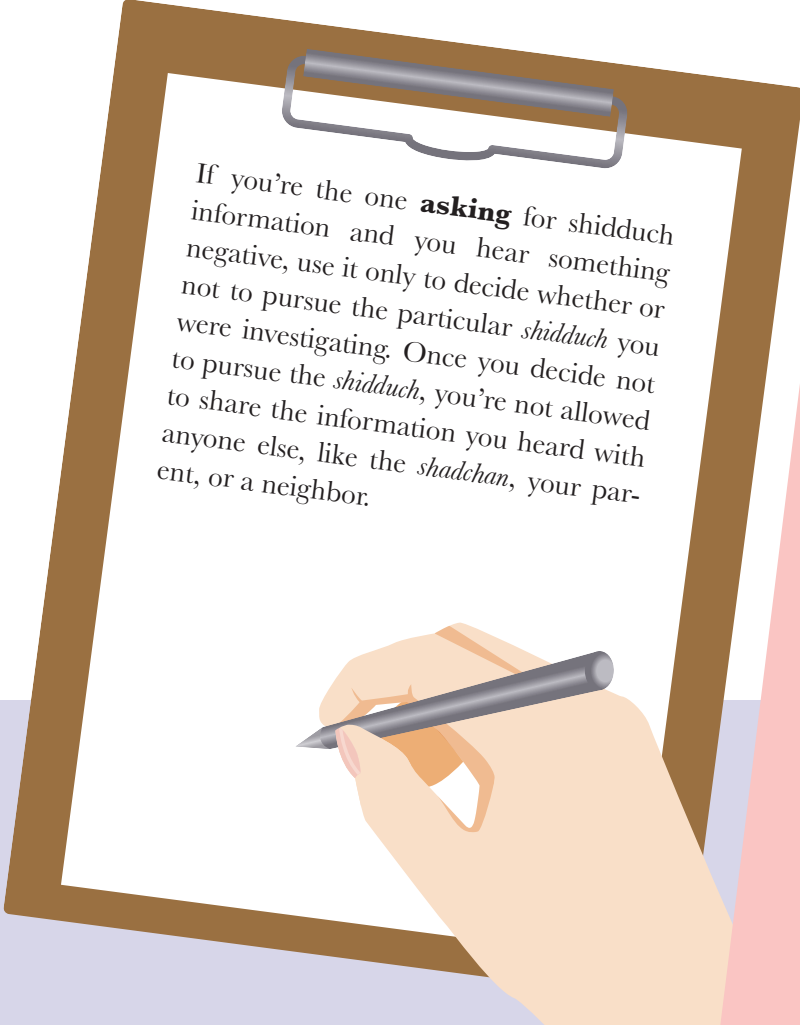
There is a difference between what may be said in the early stages and what is allowed to be said after an engagement has taken place. **Always** ask a *she'eilah* before passing on any information if the couple is already engaged.

Limits to gathering and to using information

You are not allowed to request information for *shidduch* purposes from a known enemy of the prospect or his family, or even from someone who is known to have had a disagreement with them. Although this source may be tempting because it can reveal hidden negatives, it still may not be used.

When asked for information, pass on only what will help the inquirer to decide whether to pursue a particular *shidduch*. Leave out extra details.

If you know something unflattering about a *shidduch* prospect, but you're quite sure that the person asking for the information is unlikely to shelve the *shidduch* idea because of it, don't say it.



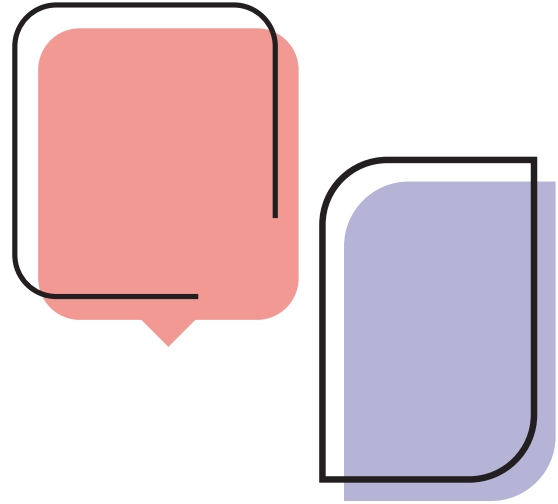
If you're the one **asking** for *shidduch* information and you hear something negative, use it only to decide whether or not to pursue the particular *shidduch* you were investigating. Once you decide not to pursue the *shidduch*, you're not allowed to share the information you heard with anyone else, like the *shadchan*, your parent, or a neighbor.

Sharing Information

It's wrong for a group of adults or students to discuss particular people and their suitability.

It's often important to discuss a prospective or current date with a parent or the *shadchan*. One rule is clear: Once you decide not to pursue a *shidduch*, you are not allowed to tell anyone why you said no unless there is a very clear purpose, even if the *shadchan* or a family member or even a parent presses you to tell. To anyone who knows that information was being collected, all you have to say is, "I decided not to pursue this *shidduch*. It wasn't for me."

In the process of researching a *shidduch*, you might uncover negative information that would be important for the *shadchan* to know in order to prevent another person from being harmed. Since this is a subjective judgment that can have major repercussions, **ask a *she'eilah***.



Shadchanim

Shadchanim have to be discreet; they have to be cautious with information they gather or pass on when suggesting *shidduchim*.

To learn more about the halachos of *shmiras halashon* please view our seforim and publications at powerofspeech.org/shop/product-category/books/

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