



Andrew Montalvo, left, and Stephanie Kostakis, both of Orlando, Fla. share a kiss as the clock strikes midnight in this Saturday, Jan. 1, 2005 file photo at Times Square in New York. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/Julie Jacobson, FILE

Kissing at the countdown to the new year: A guide to proper etiquette

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Can you - or should you - kiss your husband's brother on New Year's Eve?

If your girlfriend kisses your best friend, is she making a move?

Don't start 2008 off on the wrong lips. "Kiss the ones who care about you," says Elizabeth Kuhnke, author of "Body Language for Dummies."

Smooch wisely: Midnight might be the wooing hour, but it doesn't mean you have to pucker up for any old noisemaker.

"Stay away from your boss. And your best friend's wife or husband," says Kuhnke, who runs coaching services through Kuhnke Communication. (Otherwise, that kiss will probably ring in new problems with the new year.)

So what kind of kiss are you supposed to plant when the ball drops? That depends on the situation. Lovers kiss lovers, but after that, lip-locking can get complicated. There are various ways to achieve a nonromantic greeting.

Try a peck on the cheek, or a "Hollywood kiss," says William Cane, author of "The Art of Kissing." That's when your cheeks touch and you kiss the air. It's chummy but not too close.

If you do kiss on the lips, an "A-frame" kiss - where the smoochers' lower bodies don't touch - can help send a more modest message, Cane says.

And think about time. "The shorter the duration, the less intimate the kiss," says Cane, a pen name for Michael Christian. Don't linger if you're not in love.

If there's still discomfort in a kiss, there's nothing wrong with a hug or even a handshake, Cane says.

Then again, New Year's Eve is the second most romantic night after Valentine's Day, according to Andrea Demirjian, author of "Kissing: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About One of Life's Sweetest Pleasures."

She advises throwing caution to the wind and embracing just about anybody you happen to be near when the clock strikes 12.

"There's probably nothing more universally iconic than the New Year's Eve kiss," she says. "That first person, be it a familiar, friendly face or inauspicious acquaintance, sets the tone for your happiness and fortune in the coming year."

And if you are madly charged for the person, all the better.