

Relationships, why they fail and how to make them a success!

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INTRODUCTION.

Remember back to the early days of your relationship, and the time when you committed to your relationship by living together and making the union a permanent one, and remember how you felt. Think back to looking into the eyes of your partner and how happy you were. You vowed that your relationship was going to last forever. You were sure of that much. Because this man or this woman made you feel so special. Maybe your new husband/partner was the most romantic guy you had ever met. Maybe your new wife/partner was one of the most incredible people you had ever met. Both of you knew that this was a relationship that would work. Your life would always be as magical as it was in the very beginning. You spent the first few months of your life settling in as a married or committed couple. Perhaps you couldn't keep your hands off each other and made those around you roll their eyes at public demonstrations of affection! But you didn't care – you were in love! And then, reality sets in. You start to notice little things about your true love that drive you crazy and you think you can deal with it, and maybe you can for a while, but then, you start to pull away just a little bit.

You still love him or her, but it's just not the same. You start to take each other for granted. After all, you're married or committed – and that's part of married life or a long term relationship - isn't it? Then you wake up one morning and look over at your love and you wonder what happened to that fire – that amazing desire that couldn't be controlled. Why don't you feel like you did on your honeymoon or the first hazy days when you moved in together?

When you find the love of your life, you'll both settle into a daily routine of work, running a household, and perhaps child-rearing responsibilities, often forgetting you are a couple, right? And often romance only lasts through the initial crush of the relationship. After that you and your partner may have started taking each other for granted, right? But it does not have to be this way. There are many relationships where romance is alive and well; reading the anniversary columns in the news paper will convince you of this!

In case you think romance is a trivial subject, please know that romance matters to the health and well being of your relationship. Being romantic (and that doesn't mean grand gestures of excess) is nothing more or less than appreciating and celebrating your partner. This means if romance dies, one or both people in the relationship will begin to feel unappreciated. For many, this can be the beginning of the end of the relationship, or perhaps the beginning of an affair.

Is it just a part of life?

Do you let that fire die into just a smouldering pile of ashes? You don't have to! In fact, there is no reason at all why you can't get back what you had when you were newlyweds or when you first started living together. It just takes a little effort.

There are millions of couples out there who know what it takes to stay in love and keep their relationship fresh and new. Keeping romance alive and well in your relationship can be achieved, but it does take work. Anything in life that is truly good and satisfying takes work. However, the rewards are HUGE, so it's well worth the effort!

WHY DO SOME MARRIAGES & COMMITTED LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS FAIL?

No one gets married or moves in together expecting to get divorced or split up. Why bother in the first place? We are filled with hope when we say "I do" or "yes" to moving in together with that other person. But the cold reality is that, the divorce and separation rate is ridiculously high and rising every day.

Many people think they have to watch out for the infamous seven-year itch that comes about after this time of marriage or living together in a committed monogamous relationship. Today, couples need to watch out for the two year itch. Dissatisfaction in marriage and relationships happens earlier and earlier as people become more disillusioned with their dreams, when they don't

become reality as quickly as they think it should and their expectations are not realised.

So why do marriages and long-term relationships fail?

While the answers to these questions are many, there are negative characteristics of a relationship that create risk factors and barriers to 'oneness' in a marriage or long-term relationship, and these indicators increase the chances of the relationship floundering or ending altogether.

First, Negative Behaviour Patterns can have a hugely negative impact on a relationship. This occurs when partners respond negatively to each other continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile. When a conversation escalates into an argument, this creates tension that can eat away at a marriage.

Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight. Escalation can develop in two different ways. The first is a major shouting fight that may erupt over a conflict as small as putting the cap back on the toothpaste. As the battle heats up the partners get more and more angry, saying mean hurtful things about each other. Or, there are threats to end the relationship.

Over time those angry words damage oneness, and angry threats to leave begin to seem like prophecy. Once negative comments are made, they are hard to take back and drive a knife into the partner's heart. These reckless words can do great damage to a marriage or relationship because when an argument escalates, every comment and vulnerability becomes fair game. Concerns, failings, and past mistakes can now be used by the attacking partner and get thrown into the pot with everything else. Unity, harmony and intimacy can be shattered quickly by a few reckless words.

You may be thinking, "We don't fight like cats and dogs." And while that may be true, your relationship may still have this risk factor. Damaging escalation is not always dramatic;

voices do not have to be raised for couples to get into a cycle of returning negative for negative. Conflict over paying the rent, taking out the garbage, running errands that result in muttering to one self, rolling your eyes, or throwing up your hands can also be examples of escalation.

The next negative factor that contributes to the erosion of a relationship is **Invalidation/Minimisation**. Invalidation and minimisation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.

Invalidation and minimisation can take many forms; sometimes it can be caustic, in which one partner (or both) attacks the other person verbally. You can hear, and even feel, the contempt one partner has for another. Sarcastic phrases like "Well, I'm sorry I'm not perfect like you" or "I forgot how lucky I am to be with you" can cut like a knife. These are attacks on the person's character and personality that easily destroy a relationship. Research has found that invalidation and minimisation are two of the best predictors of future problems, breakdown of a relationship and divorce.

Invalidation can also be much more subtle. It may involve an argument where contempt for the other partner is not so obvious. One partner may merely be putting the other partner down for his or her feelings. The message conveyed is that your feelings do not matter. A husband may put his wife down because she is more emotional or because she is more easily hurt by comments.

A husband may invalidate a wife's fears about the children's safety. A wife may invalidate a husband's desire to succeed in the company, saying that it really doesn't matter if he moves up to be area manager.

Ultimately the partner receiving these comments begins to share less and less so that the intimate level of sharing evaporates. When this happens, unity is lost. Sometimes invalidation may be nothing more than trite clichés like "It's not so bad". While the sayings may be true, they invalidate and minimise the pain or concern of the other partner. They make the other partner feel like their fears or frustrations are inappropriate.

Negative Interpretations and Assumptions are the third risk factor toward a failing marriage or relationship. Negative interpretations or assumptions occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other, are more negative than is really the case or aimed at them personally when it's an external pressure that has created the situation.

Such behaviour can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erodes intimacy and unity. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents, as a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He on the other hand, may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough time for a holiday. She, in turn, considers his behaviour as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative Interpretations and assumptions build up, and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralised.

Another kind of negative interpretation is **Mind-Reading**. Mind-reading occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking, or why he or she did something or said something. Nearly everyone is guilty of mind-reading at some time or other, and when you mind-read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for any relationship.

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed relationships, there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner.

That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

Finally, there is **Withdrawal and Avoidance**. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as 'turning off' or 'shutting down' during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner's suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through what they appear to have conceded or agreed to.

Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described.

In a typical relationship, one partner is the 'pursuer' and the other is the 'withdrawer'. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely to be in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the male partner in a heterosexual relationship is the one who withdraws. Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally 'safe' enough to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband/partner withdraws, the wife/partner feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage/relationship. In other words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife/partner gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most 'pursuers' really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Each of these risk factors - escalation, invalidation and minimisation, negative interpretations and assumptions, and withdrawal or avoidance - can build barriers in a marriage or long-term relationship leading ultimately to loneliness and isolation.

The research shows that couples that want a good marriage and long-term relationship need to eliminate these risk factors from their union, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the union. It is never too late to put your relationship back on track.

IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP IN TROUBLE?

How can you tell if your relationship is in trouble? There are warning signs

Marriages or long-term committed relationships rarely die overnight. Almost always, the destruction of a relationship happens little by little, over time. Ideally, if trouble arises in your relationship you and your partner should be able to respond to problems before they cause serious damage to your relationship. You can then either work things out and remain together, or make a mutual decision to separate or get divorced. However, if your relationship is in serious trouble, any discussion, cooperation, or compromise may be impossible, and you may have no option but to end it yourself, possibly against your partner's wishes.

When you are having problems, whether they are big or small, the sooner you face facts and decide what to do about them the better. Burying your head in the sand when it comes to relationship woes won't make your problems go away. In fact, they'll probably just get worse.

You may find yourself replaying old arguments, resurrecting old hurts, crying a lot, or becoming consumed with anger when your relationship is in trouble. Those responses can quickly turn small problems into big ones, and cause you to lose all perspective when it comes to your partner and your relationship. Furthermore, when you let your emotions get out of control, it becomes difficult if not impossible for you to identify and realistically assess all the options you have for dealing with your troubles.

To help bring some objectivity and common sense to your situation so that you can gain a true appreciation of just how bad (or not so bad) things really are, consider some of the more common signs of a relationship in crisis, such as infidelity and contempt. Although no tests exist that can tell you if your problems are typical reactions to the stresses and strains most relationships experience at one time or another, or if they point to more serious issues, troubled marriages and long-term relationships do tend to exhibit many of the same characteristics.

How many of the following statements apply to your relationship?

- In your mind, your partner just can't do anything right anymore.
- You fight constantly.
- You've lost the ability or the willingness to resolve your relational problems.
- Resentment and contempt have replaced patience and love.
- You've turned from lovers into roommates.
- One or both of you is having an affair.
- You go out of your way to avoid being together and, when you are together, you have nothing to talk about.
- Your children are reacting to the stress in your relationship by fighting more, having difficulty in school, getting into trouble with the police, abusing drugs or alcohol, or becoming sexually promiscuous.
- You have begun having thoughts about separation or divorce.
- When you're not around your partner, you act more confident and in control

Don't panic if you find that your relationship exhibits some of

these characteristics — you are not necessarily headed for divorce court or life as a single person. However, you do have cause for concern and it's time for you and your spouse, first separately and then together, to assess your options and decide what to do next.

Some couples choose to see a couple's counsellor, and this can be an excellent way to figure out where exactly your relationship started to get into trouble. But you can regain the contentment, happiness, and fulfilment of a happy relationship by yourself if you are committed to working toward that end result.

Helpful hint 1 - Read: Is it over?

FIGHTING FAIR

Traditionally, when couples fight, have misunderstandings, discover a lack of things in common, or confront the challenge of incompatibility, their first instinct is to flee while rationalising to themselves "this will never work, we're just too different." It really doesn't have to be this way. Arguments will occur in your relationship. It's a fact. Those arguments can wear away at your good feelings toward your partner and wreak havoc with the way you get along. Learn how to fight fair, and you won't have to worry about your fights eroding away at your romantic feelings. With commitment, courage, and the willingness to exchange stale, unconscious behaviour patterns for fresh, healthy choices, you can learn how to transform the differences into catalysts for growth, instead of fodder for heartache.

Helpful hint 2 - Read: Productive Arguing Guidelines

MAKING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WORK

Our first reaction to conflict is to run away from it rather than face it. It's natural, but running away doesn't help resolve the conflict, it only escalates it. Your goal is to discover a new way of being together, a resolution that satisfies both of you. Therefore, each of you needs to speak your half of the problem and listen

respectfully and with genuine curiosity to your partner's point of view.

Helpful hint 3 - Read: Goal setting

First of all, you need to define the issue. Truthfully express what is disturbing you in as much detail as possible. Don't leave your partner in the dark when it comes to what is troubling you. Use your words and express yourself fully. This is the essential first step toward conflict resolution. Realise that it's alright to feel your feelings. Experience and communicate your feelings as honestly and openly as you can in the moment you are feeling them. Remember that you care. Keep in mind that ongoing relationships are a mosaic made up of many facets, and there is more to your partner and your relationship than any one issue. You need to work through that issue and not let it define who either of you are as a person.

Helpful hint 4 - Read: Time out and Anger Contracts

Beware of self-sabotage. Stay aware of what's going on inside you during a rough spot in the relationship, don't allow old negative behaviour patterns to swamp the present moment. This could be the worst thing you can do when in conflict with the one you love. It's easy to assign blame all on yourself when there is a problem. Just remember that it doesn't matter who has the initial problem, what matters is that you resolve it in a way that is best for both of you! Change your mind set. Open yourself to the fact that any issue can be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways, otherwise you'll continue to stay in a rut and progressively dig the hole deeper with every conflict.

Helpful hint 5 - Read: Action on Anger

Take personal responsibility, but not too much! Ask yourself in what way or ways do you contribute to the situation that upsets you or your partner. Rarely if ever in an ongoing relationship does a difficulty arise that has not been contributed to by both partners. Remember that your partner is not you. Learn to internalise and understand that your partner is not you. Your

resolutions will be respectful of your differences only when you both find ways to empathise with the other's point of view. Be consciously creative. Hold the other in your consciousness as you want to be held. Appreciate and value the other's experience in the ways that it is different from yours. This is especially helpful as it will keep you from transferring blame onto your partner when it's just a problem that needs to be solved. Seek both resolutions and solutions. As you seek a resolution, remember that you are two different people, and the resolution needs to reveal not an either/or but a both/ and quality. Resolutions aren't about winning; they're about a process of respect and intimacy, growth and emergence.

Helpful hint 6 - Read: Self-Help (17 Questions)

Guard against the very dangerous belief that if you're having difficulty with your partner, that means your relationship is in trouble. More than likely it means your relationship needs a tune-up and an oil change. Only in romantic fantasy does everything go smoothly without attention, care and change. So we've given you some general tips to try and bring romance, harmony and contentment back into your marriage, here are more specifics.

START TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS.

The roots of relational disenchantment are usually exposed shortly after marriage or the commitment to live together when reality intrudes on fantasy. This adjustment period reveals the other's imperfections; shortcomings once viewed as minor and glossed over in the full bloom of love, suddenly take on ominous dimensions. Cute eccentricities grow into aggravating annoyances. Rudeness replaces romance. Each partner defends his or her own territory, and the one Union or souls, reverts to two identities, as the fantasy of romantic 'oneness' begins to fade. Requests become demands. Relational disharmony takes over and negative actions, left unchecked, can spell disaster for two well-intentioned former lovers.

Many couples love each other deeply, and genuinely enjoy each others' company, yet feel that the relationship is stale.

They long for some of the old intensity, romance, and spontaneity. Others don't see the need for that intensity, or even believe that it's possible to feel that again. They assume that intensity exists only at the beginning of a relationship, and that "mature love" is more settled and less exciting.

While how we feel toward each other certainly changes and evolves over the years, the truth is that our relationships reflect what we put into them. Children can be so carefree and loving because they have lived for just a few years—a much shorter time in which to accumulate negative experiences and build up feelings of resentment, anger, and mistrust. Relationships are similar to this; in the beginning, we don't know each other very well, and aren't carrying around resentments from past interactions with each other. As the years go by, these resentments accumulate. We no longer look at our partner with the same fresh, non-judging eyes. So what do you do? Retreating into your own worlds will only serve to damage the relationship more.

There are several things you can do to regain the romance, and by romance we are not talking about flowers, chocolates and a nice meal! It has to start within each of you. Both of you must be willing to give a little in order to get back that fire that was there in the early days, weeks and months of your relationship.

Start by taking another look at your partner; a good, hard look at who they are. Look at your partner with a fresh look, let go of past baggage, and remember all the reasons you love her/him so much. This means stretching past any resentments, and opening up to feelings and giving love more fully.

Start out by thinking about your partner and all the reasons why you fell in love with her/him in the first place. What attracted you to him or her initially? How did you feel when you were around each other? Early in your relationship when you were telling others about this great new person in your life, what did you tell them? Did he make you laugh? Did her smile light up a room?

When we take a look at our partner with the same eyes we had early on in the relationship, we can start seeing that those

qualities that attracted you to them in the first place are really still there. They have just been overshadowed by all the other stuff that everyday life throws at you both.

This is about what that person really means to you. Certainly it's more than just someone to be around, sure, you love the security, but what about the companionship, the things you share, the past you have lived? Maybe there have been some rough patches, but there have been good times too. Remember them, wrap your mind around them, and focus on them. That is what will get you started toward bringing romance and warmth back to your relationship.

Once you do this, resolve to become **self-directed** in your quest towards a more passionate and harmonious relationship.

Partners must become responsible for their own actions, and what they say. Each partner should identify and recognise his or her inaccurate, exaggerated expectations. **Recognition precedes change.**

Helpful hint 7 - Read: Making Changes

By recognising exaggerated expectations, each partner creates room for manoeuvring and motivation for change. This, then, is self-direction: directing the attention to our own unrealistic expectations of the other. Each partner takes full responsibility for his or her thoughts and actions, whether they are realistic or selfishly imagined.

Helpful hint 8 - Read: Irrational Ideas, Fixed Rules, & Challenging Faulty Thinking

Now change can begin to take place in a relationship.

The implications of this new approach are enormous. It takes two people to have a relationship, but only one to change it. We end up feeling helpless and out of control in our marriages and long-term relationships simply because we can't control our partners.

The truth is that we need only learn to control ourselves. We ultimately come to feel alone in our relationship because we have replaced an accepting attitude toward our partner with unconscious expectations that are ultimately self-defeating. The first rule of behaviour and controlling our emotions is to accept the fact that we can't change others, we can only change ourselves. Frustration comes from trying to manipulate those around us when we really should be concentrating on us, and our own behaviours and reactions.

Helpful hint 9: Use Automatic Negative Thought Records. Challenging Negative Thoughts.

Being self-directed—taking personal responsibility for one's own actions—empowers both partners; rather than feeling victimised, each partner gains greater control over his or her life. A positive, constructive effect begins to transform the relationship.

Counsellors know that when one partner begins to change for the better, invariably the entire relationship improves. Many couples are committed to their relationship in spite of the self-centred, self-gratifying, self-orientated influences of the world around them. When a partner is struggling to get their own way in their relationship it begins to shift their frame of thinking from a demanding, to a sustaining and supportive one, they can happily find themselves in a second 'honeymoon'.

Specific steps must be taken to pave the way to a renewed and revitalised relationship. Relational happiness requires de-mythologising the marriage or committed partnership you are in, fairly evaluating unrealistic expectations, and replacing them with the healthy realities of a fulfilling relationship.

Helpful hint 10 - Read: Cognitive Restructuring

POSITIVE STEPS TO REBUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Self-Direction.

First you must lay down the foundation before you start down the road. Becoming self-directed in your quest for a better relationship is a great way to start; you must face the facts. The notion that if your partner really loves you he or she will automatically change for you is usually an illusion. Here is where self-direction can help. Rather than demanding that your partner change for you, why not ask your partner what he or she would like you to change?

Helpful hints 11 - Read: Self-Reflection

Self-direction brings immediate positive benefits. As one partner begins to change, renewed respect follows, and an example is set for the other to follow. It's never easy to admit to personal faults and shortcomings, but, when we ask for them to be pointed out and take concrete steps to change them, the situation improves for both partners. Be honest, and face the facts, even if you're uncomfortable taking these steps. Realise that you need to grow, when you do so your relationship will also grow.

Understand what your partner's needs.

Helpful hints 12 - Read: Expressing Anger and Making Requests.

Another myth is that if your partner really loved you, he or she would always understand you. The story goes that an older couple sought marriage counselling, and the counsellor asked the husband if he had ever told his wife of 35 years that he loved her. He responded: "Well, I don't think I need to do that over and over. After all, I told her I loved her when we got married." This man, along with, perhaps many others didn't realize that we all need reassurance now and then to allay our normal doubts and insecurities. Understanding that your partner requires a certain sensitivity to his or her needs (and that those needs may be different to your own) allows you to see your differences are not hindrances toward a happy relationship, but as strengths, because your personalities complement one another.

Well-meaning couples sometimes see differences as negotiable, but negotiation is too often motivated by a selfish want rather

than by love or selflessness. No two human beings are exactly alike. On the surface we may appear similar in many ways, but underneath the surface many differences can lie hidden. Those differences become more pronounced under pressure. Rather than negotiating differences to fit one's selfish desires, try to view your partner's differences positively, as strengths.

Partners can benefit from their differences; making two much stronger than one, for example, women are usually more intuitive, while men are more analytical, so rather than negotiate away such differences, try accepting your partner's strengths. When key decisions need to be made by either partner or both, the woman's intuition and the man's analytical makeup can combine for a better decision. Combining strengths, rather than letting them be a potential source of conflict, can be a powerful factor in building a successful relationship.

A GOOD RELATIONSHIP REQUIRES EFFORT & HARD WORK.

Helpful hint 13 - Read: Communication Practice

Some partners assume that if they have to work on their relationship there must be something wrong with it. Perhaps this assumption comes from a naively romantic outlook toward marriage and long-term committed relationships, shaped by popular entertainment and culture.

Most who plan to marry or publicly commit to a relationship, assume their union is different, and therefore impervious to problems so common to the rest of us. What every married couple soon finds out is that, although marriage is wonderful, it is also sometimes quite difficult and this applies to any long-term relationship married or otherwise. Difficult is not always bad; the human experience is fraught with difficulties, enabling us to empathise with others in their hardships. As in life, so it is in relationships, life in general and specifically relationships can be happy, but both can be filled with difficulties.

Good relationships don't just happen; they are cultivated. The good ones are sustained by good works. To bear the rich fruit of a happier relationship requires a personal investment of

time, interest and diligence. One person put it this way: "The only relationship that doesn't require work is the one that's not worth having." Some assume that having to work on a marriage after saying "I do" or agreeing to set up home together, is proof that the relationship wasn't good enough in the beginning. This notion demonstrates a lack of understanding. The truth is that all marriages and relationships, and especially those we consider the happiest, are unions that both partners have worked on. Work correctly implies sacrifice; work or sacrifice in relationship helps make romantic lovers into inseparable friends.

Don't just be lovers, be friends as well. In the most fruitful and productive marriages and long-term relationships, partners share the relationship of friendship, as well as romantic love. Many psychological and emotional differences come into play in these relationships, of course. Friendship brings a significantly different array of experiences and feelings to a relationship from those brought by romance. In terms of its effect, the friendship aspect within a relationship can be the most significant because of the amount of time partners spend together, especially as the relationship matures and grows. Romance in relationships can be rekindled and it will be by those who are working at having a happier relationship rather than leaving it to chance.

You must change your state of mind if you want your relationship to succeed.

Helpful hint 14 - Read: Self-Help (6 Questions)

THINKING FOR A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

There are certain attitudes and actions that can help bring romance, harmony and contentment back to your relationship. Adopting these attitudes can help keep romance alive or revive it in ways you never thought possible. When you get frustrated over your partner's laziness or sick to death of your partner's nagging, look at this list and put them to use, you might be quite surprised at what a change they can make!

First, Learn compassion and acceptance, realise that your

partner is human, no matter how perfect he or she seemed in the beginning, he is going to do things that bug you, she is going to do things to disappoint you. Expect this, in fact, is there any relationship of any type where this is not the case?

Try to have as much compassion for and acceptance of your partner as you do for your friends. Most importantly, remember, your partner is not imperfect to hurt you! His or her imperfections are not an indication of lack of love for you. Communicate, communicate, and communicate negative emotions.

Helpful hint 15 - Read: Peace Making

Communicate when you feel hurt, communicate when you need something to change, communicate when you are disappointed, communicate when you feel angry and communicate when you feel needy. It is the negative emotions, like these that we tend to not want to communicate in a relationship. We think we are taking care of our partner by sparing him or her our anger or disappointment. In fact, when we hold our negative emotions back, we are quietly releasing poison into the atmosphere of the relationship. The best thing to do with any negative emotion is to get it out in the open and resolve it. But, communicate these emotions instead of accusing your partner of making you feel this way or that.

Appreciate and celebrate your partner every day. I know this one is hard to do, but here is something that will help immediately. Live each day as if this is the last day you have with your partner. I don't mean to be fatalistic, but accidents happen all of the time. For all you know, today could be the last day you and your partner have together, and if it is the last day, you won't know it until it is over. The thing most people regret when a loved one dies is not having had the opportunity to say "I love you." If a loved one has died in your life, you know exactly what I mean. Live each day as if it were the last day of your relationship. If this really was the last day with your partner, you would want him or her to know how much he or she is loved and appreciated.

RECONNECTING PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

The following suggestions can be implemented anytime you want to rekindle the romance that has gone away. They are simple but very powerful!

Get back in touch with each other. In the beginning, couples often touch each other: holding hands, stroking hair, hugging, putting their arms around each other. When romance falls away from a marriage, often the only times people touch is when they want sex. This can make your partner feel used and unloved. Why does the touching disappear after marriage or once you have been intimate? It may feel proper to practice physical restraint in the early stages of a relationship, but once you are given the green light to touch in a sexual way, the impulse for affectionate touching may ebb. After the intense pleasure of sexual touch, a simple hug can pale by comparison! But women especially need that non-sexual touch. Think of how good it feels when your partner snuggles up against you. Women never lose that strong need to be held. Men need to be tuned into this desire and start that touching again.

Obviously sex is an important component of any couple's romantic relationship. But there is so much more to physical affection than intercourse. Do you and your partner regularly hug, hold hands, smooch, nuzzle, and walk arm in arm?

Touching is a ready-made reservoir of relational energy and intimacy. Touch each other every day. Physical connection is essential to the health and longevity of the relationship, as well as to the health and longevity of each of you. If you have been out of practice for a while, you may not feel romantic at first, may not want to be intimate with your partner. Even if it feels artificial, I suggest you try to connect physically. As you reconnect, you will find it gets easier to continue reconnecting and to bring the romance and even love back into your relationship.

This is where communication is important - Remember when you first met and found yourself talking for hours and hours as you got to know each other? So often, when we marry or the

partnership becomes established, those conversations die off as we go about taking care of the business of life. We don't make time to talk to each other like we used to. Your feelings about your partner may not have changed, but you just express them differently. In the beginning, you listen to the other person to learn more about them, but once you know these things, you may feel like you've run out of things to say and don't find any need to really listen anymore. However, women experience greater intimacy by sharing their thoughts and feelings. This might make most men cringe, but it's a fact that most women are talkers – even if what they have to say might not seem important. This makes men feel as though they have to solve whatever problem their partners is having - putting undue pressure on them. Instead of trying to get your partner to talk, try to get them to listen. When you just sit and listen to your partner without the pressure of having to provide solutions to problems, you will relax more and be more willing to share your own victories and losses. When you take the time to talk – even about the mundane things – you'll realise that you're in this relationship together and you will experience even greater closeness!

Make a list of the special days that you celebrate together, such as the day you met, a monthly or yearly anniversary date, or even the anniversary of a special date from your past. On these days make a point to spend some time quality time together. Cook a special meal, buy a card, write a short letter and let your spouse know that you didn't forget. Toast each other when you sit down to dinner. It doesn't need to be over bubbly or wine, but even a glass of water or iced tea. Tell your partner something you love about him or her and then drink to it!

Let your spontaneous side show through. Taking someone for granted can be the result of getting stuck in a bad routine. Break the routine by meeting up after work if that is something you don't normally do. Allow for more romance in your life. Take pictures often. Don't save the camera for holidays and special occasions. Create a visual scrapbook of your everyday lives together. Better still, set the timer and pose together. You will both appreciate the warmth of the moment when you see these snapshots in an album down the road.

Set something aside for your partner every day. It might be a magazine article you read during your commute, a link to a website you came across, or even a story you heard at the office. They will appreciate that you took a moment to think of them during the course of your day.

Do something thoughtful every day. Maybe it's making a cup of tea in the morning, sticking a surprise note in his or her bag or leaving a chocolate love heart on the pillow. Be on the lookout for ideas for birthday, holiday, and anniversary gifts, plus "no reason" surprise gifts. Pay attention when your partner mentions things he or she likes or expresses interest in something that could make a good gift, such as a new CD, a book, or theatre, concert, sports tickets. It's very flattering to know that someone really tried to find a gift that was just what you wanted. Everyone loves a romantic surprise.

Music that you and your partner both like can set a romantic tone. If you see a movie that you both enjoyed a lot, you might consider buying the sound track as a surprise gift the following week. You could also select a song that you both like and decide to make it "your song." Or you could pick a song and tell your partner that it reminds you of him or her for some positive reason.

Celebrate every occasion you can think of-the anniversary of the day you met, when you moved in together, when you became engaged, your marriage anniversary, civil ceremony anniversary, your birthdays, seeing the full moon, and anything else you can come up with. You can toast with champagne (or non-alcoholic champagne) and perhaps have a celebration meal. But it can be just as fun to make a big deal out of going out for an ice cream cone to celebrate.

Let him or her see you at your best. It's ironic that we dress up to meet total strangers but let ourselves go around our nearest and dearest. Most partners love to see their loved ones in attractive colours, nicely fitting clothes and perhaps wearing a hint of their favourite fragrance. Keeping a tidy appearance is simple but most important.

When you were dating, chances are that the compliments were free-flowing. After you've been together for a while, the compliments start to go away. Why? Maybe you stop noticing your partner's appearance. Perhaps you just don't take the time to really notice your partner. This can cause your spouse to feel hurt and rejected. It can even cause them to stop taking care of themselves and trying to be attractive for you. Even worse, it could cause them to try and look especially nice for other people. We all know what that can lead to!

As we grow older, our bodies change, it's inevitable and just as our bodies change, our relationships also change. It can be a huge help to your relationship if you reassure your partner that you still find them attractive and sexy. Don't assume that your partner knows this – tell them!

Be generous with your compliments. It's always easier to practice flattery at the start of a relationship, but also easier to forget to say later on. Remember that everyone loves a sincere compliment and your partner is no different. Remember that compliments are free.

Trust your partner's decisions. You may not agree with everything your partner does, but truly having trust in another person requires that you accept the decisions they make. You may not always agree with the way they handle a crisis situation for example, and while it is your responsibility to talk about your concerns, it's also your responsibility to step back and not argue once a decision has been reached. And if the outcome doesn't play out as he anticipated, avoid saying "I told you so."

Be honest if you are feeling stressed or under the weather, your partner will appreciate your honesty and will know not to take it personally when you are in a bad mood.

You've heard people say that it's the little things that mean the most in a relationship. Those little things can make the difference between a relationship filled with romance or angst. What little things are we talking about? Taking out the rubbish, unloading the dishwasher, washing the car, making a meal, making a cup of coffee when your partner gets home. Men and women alike appreciate the little things. When you

can express your love by doing something small, your partner will know that you realise those little things can add up. You are making your partner happy and they will feel like you are really a team. Regularly communicate your mutual significance to each other. Look for every opportunity to tell your spouse, "You are the most important person in my life." You can convey this verbally, in writing, or through acts of kindness. This can be something small like bringing home your mate's favourite ice cream or buying them a book with a touching inscription inside. These small gestures assure your partner that they are in your thoughts when we're apart, and this draws you closer to each other.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Most relationships start out very loving and both partners are happy as clams. Then, as months pass, one or the other might become disenchanted. You talk less and less. The change might be so gradual that you don't even notice it. Eventually, it becomes clear that one of you is genuinely unhappy. At this point, you have to realise that time is what your partner needs in order to feel loved and needed again. Try devoting 20 minutes exclusively to them. Make them the focus of those 20 minutes and shut out everything else that might try to distract you.

Employ some of the tactics we've already talked about: listen to their concerns, talk about your day, dream about the future, and reminisce about the past. Devoting this time to your partner will be freeing, liberating, and a moment you can share. Both of you will find yourselves looking forward to that 20 minutes and saving up each other! Be spontaneous with your partner it is a way to help your relationship flourish. Being spontaneous with your partner can enrich and strengthen your intimate moments. Try something that you have been wanting to do. Don't be shy, express yourself and see what works! Spontaneity is the spice of life, or so they say, but sometimes the "fly by the seat of your pants" philosophy is the best way to live. It's new, fresh, and fun! Do something out of the ordinary, surprise your partner and have fun doing it! This doesn't have to be something huge and monumental, It can be as simple as taking off for a day's jaunt to

the local museum. Maybe you'll put together your partner's favourite meal and serve it by candlelight. Better yet, serve it to them in your altogether! What a great way to show your fun side!

Talk, listen and laugh together, become best friends. You will soon start creating a bond of intimacy. Be sincere open and honest. Communicate about love, sex and the relationship. Create consistent times to talk about your relationship. When a couple feels like their relationship is dry and dull, think about what you usually talk about when you're alone. Most often it will be work, the kids, finances, and upcoming events. At this point, ask how much time you spend focusing on your relationship — on your love life. Usually, you'll find yourself noticing that you focus very little time on your love life. Romance, and intimacy is sure to wane if you spend the majority of your time together discussing mundane things. The next time you're alone with your spouse, focus on your relationship. Lovers who still have fire between them are in the habit of discussing their relationship, talking about how their love was born, and sharing with each other what they feel.

Don't forget to date. That's right; you can actually date even after many years together, put aside special time and recapture the excitement of those well-planned, anxiously awaited dates you had when you first met. Wear your best clothes, go to a fancy restaurant, hold hands, and look into each other's eyes like you did when you were dating. You wouldn't have even thought about cancelling a date when you first got together, so don't let the mundane duties of life get in the way of time with each other now.

Go on a weekend getaway at least twice a year if finances permit. As enriching as dates are, you also need extended periods of unhurried, relaxing time to nurture your love. Go somewhere conducive to letting go of tension and daily concerns. Wherever you go, make sure times of romance are central to your daily schedule. Why don't you take the initiative, call and make all the arrangements ahead of time. The outing doesn't have to be expensive or complex. It might be as simple as planning a picnic at a nearby scenic spot. You might prepare the surprise picnic lunch when your partner is in the shower. Or you might make

arrangements for a restaurant to pack a gourmet lunch for the two of you that you could pick up on your way out of town.

Spend lots of time dreaming together. There is something wildly attractive about merging our hopes and dreams for the future with someone else's, and working toward the realisation of shared dreams contributes dramatically to the level of romance in a relationship. Indeed, the best relationships involve people who have a well-formed vision of the life they are pursuing together. I encourage you to have a dream for the next year of your relationship, and another for the next five years, and another for the next 10 years.

Place a high priority on laughter and levity. Laughing together creates a magical bond. When you and your partner find humour in the same thing, you are fused together at that moment. Relive funny events from your lives, swap stories, watch wacky movies together — whatever makes you laugh, do it often. Frequently offer foot massages, shoulder massages, and full-body massages to your partner. If you keep some great-smelling lotion handy and take ten minutes to massage your partner's tired feet at the end of a long work day.

Note: If you expect to be rewarded for your efforts by sex, you won't accumulate any points for being romantic. Your partner will just think you have an ulterior motive when you offer a massage in the future. Do this unselfishly and enjoy the rewards!

Another way to be romantic is to look for opportunities to pamper and spoil your partner. That might be letting a partner sleep in late while you watch the kids, or it could be telling your partner to sit down and relax while you clean up after dinner. The key is in the delivery of the offer. You might say, "Nothing is too good for my sweetheart" or "You're such a love. It's fun to pamper you." You can accompany your words with a hug or kiss.

Talking in front of your partner to someone else about your partner's good points is romantic. Take full advantage of opportunities to say, "I'm so lucky to have such a supportive partner/wife/husband, she/he is such a treasure. I'm very lucky."

There are hundreds of men and women out there who don't feel like they can be romantic. It goes against their every feeling of comfortableness and ease. It feels foreign and wrong, but being romantic is important in re-kindling those feelings you had when you first got together.

ADVICE FOR THE ROMANTICALLY CHALLENGED!

For some, romance comes easily and naturally. For others, being romantic can be difficult at best. One of the most important things to remember when it comes to being romantic is that it isn't so much what we do, but that we try to do something - anything. Romance is one of those things which even a lame attempt beats the heck out of no attempt at all. So for all those who let their fear of looking silly or their lack of a romantic flare stop them from at least trying to be romantic, quit worrying and start doing! That's the wonderful thing about romance - even if you do come off looking a bit inept, it just adds to the charm.

It's often the little things that say the most, so don't feel being romantic takes a grand gesture or requires an expensive gift - that's just not the case. Simply put, you need not be a poet to write a love letter. You don't have to be gourmet chef to prepare a candle lit dinner for two. As long as what you do or say comes from the heart, you can't go wrong.

Often, if we keep our eyes and ears open, our partners will give us clues to what they find romantic, etc. Sometimes the very things they do for us are a good indication of what they would like us to do for them. Keep in mind, romance is more about feelings and emotions, than it is about things. Mood, spontaneity, and speaking from the heart are much more important than anything you could ever buy in a store.

Being romantic is nothing more than the means by which we convey to our partners all the loving thoughts and feelings we have for them in our hearts and minds. Even for those who find it difficult to express these things, it's important to try, and try often. Your partner will love you for it, and your relationship will flourish because of it. That's the thing about relationships, like

anything else, the more effort and thought we put into them, the better they become.

CONCLUSION

Every relationship needs a healthy dose of on-going romance to add spice, delight, and fun to the relationship. It's not enough to just start out with a sizzling romance. You have to find a way to keep the romance alive as the months and years accumulate. One of the relational challenges many couples face is how to live together without losing that special romantic spark. It's all-too-easy to lose the role of lover along the way. When this happens, partners often start relating to each other as they would to a friend or a sibling. Parents can begin to feel they are only "business partners" joined together to raise their children and keep the household running.

There are certain things in every relationship that should remain sacred. You must trust each other, you must nurture each other, and you must show each other that you care about what the other person feels. If there is a conflict, disagreement or challenge that comes up, resolve that you will talk to each other instead of venting your frustrations with a friend or co-worker.

This should be a sacred agreement with each other. This means telling the other person what you are thinking as soon as you have sorted it out for yourself, and this proves impossible, talk to a trained relationship counsellor, who will be impartial, non-judgmental and accepting of all your anxieties and worries and everything you say remain confidential and private.

Don't feel like you have to hide or sugar-coat the truth about a situation or unload on a friend how you are truly feeling without first telling each other. This doesn't mean you should never talk to friends and other family members about your thoughts or what's happening in your lives and sometimes this is helpful. What is important though is that you agree to tell each other first.

If you find that you have been complaining to other people about your partner or someone close to you and you are not telling your partner how you are feeling, stop. By talking to others first about your issues instead of the person involved, you will continue to erode the safety and trust in your relationship. By talking to others about your issues instead of the person your conflict is with, you could be playing the role of the victim or martyr. Believe it or not, you may actually be enjoying the sympathy and attention from other people that you are getting from complaining about the situation with your partner.

If you want to build trust and create a close, connected relationship, this kind of behaviour needs to stop. Choosing to let your partner know where you stand and what is going on inside you is not only a way to build trust but also a way to deepen your connection as well.

When men and women enter into a heterosexual or same sex relationship, what they are really looking for is a best friend; someone they know will love them no matter what. Deep inside of you there are powers that if discovered and used would allow you to achieve all that you ever dreamed or imagined you could become.

We need romance. We need to snuggle in front of a roaring fire, linger over a delicious meal, and take time to find out what's going on in our partner's life. We need to hear these miraculous words whispered over and over: "I love you — and I will for as long as I live."

You learn

After a while you learn
the subtle difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul.
And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning,
and company doesn't mean security

And you begin to learn
that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises.

And you begin to accept your defeats with your head held up,
and your eyes ahead, with the grace of a woman or a man,
not the grief of a child.

And you learn to build all your roads today,
because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans,
and futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight.

After a while you learn
that even sunshine burns if you ask too much.

So plant your own garden and decorate your own soul,
instead of waiting for someone else to bring you flowers.

And learn that
you really can endure, that you really are strong,
that you really do have worth.

And you learn, and you learn,
with every failure, with every experience,
you learn.