



Relationship Help

Building Satisfying Relationships that Last



A healthy, secure romantic relationship can be an ongoing source of support and happiness in life. It can strengthen all aspects of your wellbeing, from your physical and mental health to your work and connections with others. However, a relationship that isn't supportive can be a tremendous drain on you emotionally. Love and relationships take work, commitment, and a willingness to adapt and change with your partner. Whether you're looking to keep a healthy relationship strong or repair a relationship on the rocks, these tips can help you build a caring and lasting union.

How to strengthen your relationship and make love last

For most people, falling in love usually seems to just happen. It's preserving that "falling in love" experience that requires commitment and work. Given its rewards, though, it's well worth the effort. By taking steps now to preserve or rekindle your falling in love experience, you can build a meaningful relationship that lasts—even for a lifetime.

What makes a healthy love relationship?

Everyone's relationship is unique, and people come together for many different reasons. But there are some things that good relationships have in common. Knowing the basic principles of healthy relationships helps keep them meaningful, fulfilling and exciting in both happy times and sad.

Staying connected with each other. Some relationships get stuck in peaceful coexistence, but without truly relating to each other and working together. While it may seem stable on the surface, lack of involvement and communication increases distance. When you need to talk about something important, the connection and understanding may no longer be there.

Don't be afraid of (respectful) disagreement. Some couples talk things out quietly, while others may raise their voices and passionately disagree. The key in a strong relationship, though, is not to be fearful of conflict. You need to be safe to express things that bother you without fear of retaliation, and be able to resolve conflict without humiliation, degradation or insisting on being right.

Keeping outside relationships and interests alive. Despite the claims of romantic fiction or movies, no one person can meet all of your needs. In fact, expecting too much from your partner can put unhealthy pressure on the relationship. To stimulate and enrich your romantic relationship, it's important to preserve connections with family and friends and maintain hobbies and interests outside of the relationship as well.

Open and honest communication. Good communication is a key part of any relationship. When both people feel comfortable expressing their needs, fears, and desires, trust and bonds are strengthened. A big part of good communication is nonverbal cues. For a relationship to work well, each person has to understand their own and their partner's [nonverbal cues or "body language."](/articles/relationships-communication/nonverbal-communication.htm) (/articles/relationships-communication/nonverbal-communication.htm)

Tip 1: Spend quality time together

You fall in love looking at and listening to each other. If you continue to look and listen in the same attentive ways, you can sustain the falling in love experience over the long term. You probably have fond memories of when you were first dating your loved one. Everything seemed new and exciting, and you likely spent hours just chatting together or coming up with new, exciting things to try. However, as time goes by, the demands of work, family, other obligations, and the need we all have for time to ourselves can make it harder to find time together.

Many couples find that the face-to-face contact of their early dating days is gradually replaced by hurried texts, emails, and instant messages. While digital communication is great for some purposes, it doesn't positively impact your brain and nervous system in the

same way as face-to-face communication. The emotional cues you both need to feel loved can only be conveyed in person, so no matter how busy life gets, it's important to carve out time to spend together.

Do things together that benefit others

One the most powerful ways of staying close and connected is to jointly focus on something you and your partner value outside of the relationship. Volunteering for a cause, project, or community work that has meaning for both of you can keep a relationship fresh and interesting. It can also expose you both to new people and ideas, offer the chance to tackle new challenges together, and provide fresh ways of interacting with each other.

As well as helping to relieve stress, anxiety, and depression, doing things to benefit others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to help others. The more you help, the happier you'll feel-as individuals and as a couple.

Simple ways to connect as a couple and rekindle love

- **Commit to spending some quality time together every day on a regular basis.** Even during the busiest times, just a few minutes of really sharing and connecting can help keep bonds strong.
- **Find something that you enjoy doing together,** whether it is a shared hobby, dance class, daily walk, or sitting over a cup of coffee in the morning.
- **Try something new together.** Doing new things together can be a fun way to connect and keep things interesting. It can be as simple as trying a new restaurant or going on a day trip to a place you've never been before.

Tip 2: Keep physical intimacy alive

Touch is a fundamental part of human existence. Studies on infants have shown the importance of regular, affectionate physical contact on brain development. And the benefits don't end in childhood. Affectionate contact boosts the body's levels of oxytocin, a hormone that influences bonding and attachment.



(/harvard/tips-to-improve-your-sex-life.htm)

[Tips to Improve Your Sex Life](/harvard/tips-to-improve-your-sex-life.htm) (/harvard/tips-to-improve-your-sex-life.htm): Enjoy More Fulfilling Sex

While physical intercourse is often a cornerstone of a committed relationship, it shouldn't be the only method of physical intimacy. Frequent, affectionate touch—holding hands, hugging, kissing—is equally important.

Be sensitive to what your partner likes. Unwanted touching or inappropriate overtures can make the other person tense up and retreat—exactly what you don't want.

Tip 3: Stay connected through communication

Good communication is a fundamental part of a healthy relationship. When people stop communicating well, they stop relating well, and times of change or stress can really bring out disconnect. As long as you are communicating, you can work through whatever problem you're facing.

Tell your partner what you need, don't make them guess.

It's not always easy to talk about what you need. Even when you've got a good idea of what's important to you in a relationship, talking about it can make you feel vulnerable, embarrassed, or even ashamed. But look at it from your partner's point of view. Providing comfort and understanding to someone you love is a pleasure, not a burden. So tell your partner what you need. And remember, everyone changes over time. What you needed from your partner five years ago may be different from what you need now.

Take note of your partner's nonverbal cues

So much of our communication is transmitted by what we don't say. Nonverbal cues—eye contact, tone of voice, posture, and gestures such as leaning forward, crossing your arms, or touching someone's hand—communicate much more than words. For a relationship to work well, each person has to understand their own and their partner's nonverbal cues or "body language."

Think about what you are transmitting as well, and if what you say matches your body language. If you say "I'm fine," but you clench your teeth and look away, then your body is clearly signaling you are anything but "fine."

When you experience positive emotional cues from your partner, you feel safe and happy, and when you send positive emotional cues, your loved one feels the same. When you stop taking an interest in your own or your partner's emotions, your ability to communicate will suffer, especially at stressful times.

Question your assumptions



(</articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm>)

[Effective Communication](/articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm) (</articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm>): Improving Communication Skills

If you've known each other for a while, you may assume that your partner has a pretty good idea of what you are thinking and what you need. However, your partner is not a mind-reader. While your partner may have some idea, it is much healthier to express your needs directly to avoid any confusion. Your partner may sense something, but it might not be what you need. What's more, people change, and what you needed and wanted five years ago, for example, may be very different now. Getting in the habit of expressing your needs helps you weather difficult times, which otherwise may lead to increasing resentment, misunderstanding and anger.

Tip 4: Learn to give and take in your relationship

If you expect to get what you want 100% of a time in a relationship, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. Healthy relationships are built on compromise. However, it takes work on each person's part to make sure that there is a reasonable exchange.

Recognize what's important to your partner

Knowing what is truly important to your partner can go a long way towards building goodwill and an atmosphere of compromise. On the flip side, it's also important for your partner to recognize your wants and for you to state them clearly. Constantly giving to others at the expense of your own needs builds resentment and anger.

Don't make "winning" your goal

If you approach your partner with the attitude that things have to be your way or else, it will be difficult to reach a compromise. Sometimes this attitude comes from not having your needs met while younger, or it could be years of accumulated resentment in the relationship reaching a boiling point. It's alright to have strong convictions about something, but your partner deserves to be heard as well. You are more likely to get your needs met if you respect what your partner needs, and compromise when you can.

Learn how to respectfully resolve conflict

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, but to keep a relationship strong, both people need to feel they've been heard. The goal is not to win but to resolve the conflict with respect and love.

- ▶ Make sure you are fighting fair.
- ▶ Don't attack someone directly but use "I" statements to communicate how you feel.
- ▶ Don't drag old arguments into the mix.
- ▶ Keep the focus on the issue at hand and respect the other person.



(/articles/relationships-communication/conflict-resolution-skills.htm)

[Conflict Resolution Skills](/articles/relationships-communication/conflict-resolution-skills.htm) (/articles/relationships-communication/conflict-resolution-skills.htm): Turn Conflicts into Opportunities

Tip 5: Be prepared for ups and downs

It's important to recognize that there are ups and downs in every relationship. You won't always be on the same page. Sometimes one partner may be struggling with an issue that stresses them, such as the death of a close family member. Other events, like job loss or severe health problems, can affect both partners and make it difficult to relate to each other. You might have different ideas of managing finances or raising children. Different people cope with stress differently, and misunderstanding can rapidly turn to frustration and anger.

Relationship advice for getting through life's ups and downs

- ▶ **Don't take out your problems on your partner.** Life stresses can make us short tempered. If you are coping with a lot of stress, it might seem easier to vent with your partner, and even feel safer to snap at him or her. Fighting like this might initially feel like a release, but it slowly poisons your relationship. Find other ways to vent your anger and frustration.
- ▶ **Some problems are bigger than both of you.** Trying to force a solution can cause even more problems. Every person works through problems and issues in his or her own way. Remember that you're a team. Continuing to move forward together can

- ▶ get you through the rough spots.
- ▶ **Be open to change.** Change is inevitable in life, and it will happen whether you go with it or fight it. Flexibility is essential to adapt to the change that is always taking place in any relationship, and it allows you to grow together through both the good times and the bad.

If you need outside help for relationship problems

Sometimes problems in a relationship may seem too complex or overwhelming for you to handle as a couple. In that case, it's important to reach out together for help. Available options include:

Couples counseling. Both partners need to honestly communicate what they need, face the issues that arise in counseling, and then make the necessary changes. It's also very important that both people feel comfortable with the counselor.

Individual therapy. Sometimes, one partner may need specialized help. For example, if you're grieving the loss of a loved one, you may need counseling to help process the grief. If your loved one needs help, don't feel like you're a failure for not providing everything he or she needs. No one can fulfill everyone's needs, and getting the right help can make a huge difference to your relationship.

Spiritual advice. Advice from a religious figure such as a pastor or rabbi works best if both partners have similar convictions of faith and a good relationship with the spiritual advisor.

Emotional Intelligence building. Helpguide's free [Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-toolkit.htm) (/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-toolkit.htm) provides articles, videos, and audio meditations designed to help you put the skills of emotional intelligence and communication into practice.

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