

101 Ways to Build Happy, Lasting Relationships

Dating and marriage is different than it was twenty years ago. In today's society, more than 50% of all marriages fail for one reason or another. Just thinking about that makes "commitment" seem scary. It seems that when relationships are faced with challenges, people quit trying. Dating is more like a marathon, trying to date as many people as possible, instead of taking time to get to know someone at a deeper level. For married couples, divorce is not biased. Whether married for thirty years or eight months, the outcome can be the same.

The fact is that relationships, whether dating or married, are hard. Things do not always go perfectly, fighting does occur, and it takes a 100% commitment from both parties to make it a success. Often when people break off a relationship, they feel as though something is missing. The "spark" has gone, leaving one or both people feeling inadequate and unfulfilled.

However, even though the odds are not very good, healthy, and long-lasting relationships are definitely possible and proven by many people. Look at Paul Newman and Joanne Woodard, Danny Devito and Rhea Perlman, or Nancy and Ronald Regan. What secrets do they possess? The answer is that they all work hard at their relationship. They made a decision of choosing to love their mate rather than relying on the "warm and fuzzy" feelings, which everyone knows will fade. By making love a choice you are making a decision that even in the bad times, you stick it out.

Think of it like choosing a car. You pick out the make, model, year, color, and features that you believe are best for you. After driving your car for a couple of months, you realize that perhaps you should have purchased a larger car, or that maybe the leather seats would have been better, or on hot sunny days, the sunroof would have been nice. However, it is now too late so you choose to keep your car and make it work. It is the same for marriage. Not everything will be perfect and there will be major obstacles to overcome but you have made your decision and now you choose to make it work.

There are hundreds of things you can do to better your relationship. To help get you headed in the right direction, we have chosen 101 ways to build, strengthen, and enhance your relationship.

Remember, little steps taken every day will add up to big successes.

1. Start Over

When couples first get together, everything is new and exciting. They overlook the little annoying things the other person does. However, after time, the nagging starts, instead of hearing, "You look beautiful," they might hear "Why are you wearing that shirt?" If this sounds like your relationship, first, the two of you need

to sit down and be honest that things have changed. Identify the things each other did in the beginning of the relationship that created the attraction in the first place. Then together, make a commitment to start over. The truth is, both of you will have to work on this. It will not automatically be easy but it is possible. Start by forgiving each other, forgetting the past, and then start over with the flirtation. Focus only on the special things your mate does and relearn to put the unimportant things aside. It will take some time so be patient.

2. Schedule Time

Spending quality time together is crucial. This time can be with friends, dining out, attending a sporting event, or cuddling together while watching a favorite movie. The activity is not what is important but the fact that you are together, doing something that you both enjoy. People have extremely busy schedules and between work, family, the home, errands, and everything else going on, finding time for your mate can be difficult. Just as you would schedule a meeting on your calendar, show some courtesy in the relationship by scheduling time with each other. Once the plan is in place, no backing out unless you have some life and death emergency.

3. The Power of Touch

When a child is ill, doctors will tell you that it is proven that a simple, loving touch of a parent can quickly pull the child through a crisis. It is the same for relationships. Playing with your mate's hair, rubbing their hand, a soft kiss on the neck, a soft pat on the leg or giving a gentle back rub will make a huge difference in how your mate responds to you. When was the last time you walked up to your mate for no reason and without saying a word, affectionately placed a kiss on their neck? This is not in a sexual way, but an affectionate way. There is a difference. The next time the two of you are sitting in the car, at the grocery store, or standing in line at the theater, quietly reach over and take their hand. Do not be surprised if you get a strange look of curiosity the first time!

4. Surprise

If you and your mate have scheduled some time for a Friday night dinner, put together a surprise instead. For example, if your mate loves professional wrestling, buy some tickets near the front or if they like concerts, purchase the tickets ahead of time, getting the best seats possible. When Friday night comes around, insist on driving and head toward the location where the event is taking place. When asked where you are going, simply answer, "I have a surprise for you. I know you love professional wrestling so I purchased two great seats for tonight's performance," or "I know we had planned on going to dinner, but I wanted to surprise you with something special. I purchased tickets to see one of your favorite groups in concert." The idea of you getting the tickets for something THEY like and then keeping it as a special surprise will touch the heart!

5. Needed Space

As important as it is to spend quality time together, it is equally important to give each other time to do something they like. If your mate loves to fish but you have no desire to bait a hook with little, slimy worms, or if you like to go to the casino but your mate would rather do something different, encourage each other to take time apart. Try establishing a set time for this very purpose, if possible. For example, perhaps you could determine that every other Friday night is “singles” night. This is not a time to date other people, but to enjoy preferred activities. Remember that you have to place trust in your relationship. If you try this and then drill them, to see what they did, whom they were with, and where they went, then the exercise has failed.

6. No Debates

If you know that you and your mate have proven differences in opinion on certain subjects, avoid those subjects. As an example, if you are a Republican and your mate is a Democrat, politics should probably be avoided. As the two of you identify new topics that could cause a debate session, stop the conversation before it even gets started.

7. Filler Talk

If you are married, especially with children, break out of the habit of talking about nothing. Many times, families will be sitting around the dinner table and the conversation consists of, “Do you like your carrots?”, or “I wonder what is on TV tonight?” Instead, change your strategy to include real questions, showing real interest. Replace the normal, “Did you have a good day at work?” with “Tell me what you did at work today.” Even if you do not understand everything being said, listen with interest. It is not that you are so much interested in the work, but your mate’s life.

8. Re-establish Old Traditions

If you and your mate had a tradition of some kind when you first got together, dust it off and breathe life back into it. Perhaps you met after work on Friday at the local pub for a drink, washed your cars together every Saturday morning, or attended church together on Sunday. Whatever it was, re-establish the tradition.

9. Predictability

If asking couples the factors involved in the demise of their relationship, one of the common responses is that everything in the relationship is so predictable. When rebuilding a relationship, do not be afraid of letting go of boredom. If you normally hate the fact that Saturday afternoons consist of your mate sitting for hours

watching football, fix some finger sandwiches and something cool to drink and go join them on the couch, or if your mate spends hours in the garden trying to make things look perfect, surprise them with a new flowering plant, and then help to plant it. When taking a walk with your mate, stop and give them a soft kiss, say, "I love you," and then keep walking. Take some chances and do the unexpected.

10. Lighten Up

Often when couples have gone through or are going through some bumpy spots in their relationship, things tend to get serious. It could be that there is a tremendous amount of tension or perhaps they are not sure what to say. Regardless of the reason, learn to lighten up. Do not take every comment, glance, or movement as a serious problem. If your mate makes a mistake, which you both will, let it go, or if appropriate, laugh about it. If you make a mistake, do not be afraid to poke fun at yourself. This will automatically start the process of tension breaking.

11. Communicate

When couples are having problems in a relationship, communication is the first thing to stop. It is often easier to just be quiet than to get mad. When rebuilding relationships, just as communication was the first to stop, it now needs to be the first to start. This will require that both individuals let down their guard and pretty much throw caution to the wind. Healing in the relationship cannot start until you talk. Make an agreement that you will talk about anything and everything and that you will listen, really listen. That does not mean that you will agree with everything, which is perfectly fine. However, if you do not agree, do not yell, rather, the two of you need to calmly discuss the issue and together, work out a solution. This is hard work but within a very short time, you will both feel much better, individually and as a couple.

12. A Night of Passion

Intimacy and passion in relationships is not only important but also healthy. Couples need to enjoy being together in an intimate way. When relationships are troubled, the last thing either person wants is to be sexual or passionate with each other. However, this is a part of the healing and rebuilding of the relationship and although it might be awkward in the beginning, it is crucial. Make your intimate time together special. Surprise your mate with a warm bubble bath, lighted candles, soft music, and a bottle of wine, or reserve a nice romantic evening at a local hotel to include a wonderful candlelit dinner, fine wine, and a beautiful room.

13. Dinner Party

Start a new tradition of hosting a dinner party every other month or two and inviting several of you and your mate's friends. Set up board games that everyone will enjoy, have some light and lively music playing, and plan to have a blast.

Spending time with friends in this kind of setting is a great way to reduce stress. When stress is low, couples get along better. This is a wonderful way to interact with each other's friends as a couple.

14. **Happy Birthday**

As people grow older, in general, birthdays become less celebrated. Gifts are quickly given, meals eaten, and it is over. For your mate's next birthday, take some time to plan something very special. Make this a true celebration of their life as a way of showing your love and appreciation. Every person, even adults, like attention and love to be appreciated. Whether a surprise party or not, your mate will be impressed that you went to all the effort just for them.

15. **Secret Getaway**

Plan a nice weekend getaway to some place off the beaten track where you can enjoy some privacy. A quaint cottage or charming bed and breakfast would be ideal choices. Scout out the area ahead of time and choose a few things that the two of you would like to do in the area but just be sure to leave plenty of time for you to enjoy some alone time. Order a nice bottle of wine or some hot cappuccino and relax in front of the fire! Make this a romantic weekend where you can rekindle your love.

16. **Special Greeting**

If your mate has to work late and you know he had a bad day, surprise him with a late-night gourmet meal. When you hear him arrive home, greet him in new, sexy lingerie, a warm kiss, and wonderful hot meal. After he picks himself up off the floor, he will fall in love with you all over again for this wonderful greeting. If reversed and the woman is coming home, after giving her a lingering kiss, have her join you in the dining room where the table is set with soft glowing candles and a wonderful meal. Have an envelope lying by her plate that when opened, she will read, "This certificate is good for one thirty-minute massage after dinner." This is how you keep romance alive!

17. **Just Because**

Give your mate gifts "just because." These do not have to be expensive whatsoever. For example, one woman had a miniature dish collection in her kitchen. Her husband came home and told her that he had a gift for her. Holding out her hand, he gently placed in her hand a miniature porcelain cup with her name neatly written in blue ink. She knew that this cup probably cost no more than \$2.00 but she thought that he would take the time to find something she enjoyed, was worth \$1 million. The small gifts packed with thought are far more cherished.

18. Say it with Words

Surprise your mate with little notes found in unexpected places. If your mate travels for work, place a loving note somewhere in their suitcase. Perhaps they have a long commute to work. If so, slip a note saying, "I love you," in their CD case where you know they will find it. Another recommendation is sticking a note on the bathroom mirror so this will be the first thing seen in the morning. Be creative and have some fun with this.

19. Cuddle Time

When couples first start dating, cuddling is usually a part of their everyday existence. However, as the relationship progresses or after children enter the picture, the cuddling stops. Take some time just to cuddle. If your mate is sitting on the couch watching a movie, or laying in bed reading, scoot close and tell them that you just want to cuddle. This makes both people feel secure and loved.

20. Breakfast in Bed

When was the last time you or your mate were served breakfast in bed? Never? On a Saturday or Sunday, when nothing special is planned, get up a little early and fix their favorite breakfast. Include the morning newspaper as an added bonus. Although they may be shocked, you can be guaranteed that this gesture of love will be appreciated.

21. Make the Men Feel Good

For the man in your life, here are some recommendations for making him feel special:

- Flirt with him in public places
- Just once, leave the toilet lid *up*
- Lavish him with compliments
- Tell him how sexy he is
- Act jealous once in awhile, even if you are not
- Remind him that he is a wonderful mate, husband, father, whichever applies
- Tell him how handsome you find him

22. Make the Women Feel Good

Just like men, woman love feeling good about themselves. These recommendations might help:

- Tell her how beautiful she is
- Compliment her on her many skills (be specific)
- Just once, leave the toilet seat *down*

- Tell her how much she means to you
- Let her know that she is your best friend
- Show affectionate to her in front of family and friends
- Let her know that you find her to be sexy

23. That Kiss

As couples become comfortable with each other, kisses can become lame. Get rid of the pecks and get serious with the kisses. The next time the two of you greet each other, enjoy your kiss and do not be so quick to stop. While there are appropriate times for serious kissing, they should be loving, sincere, and passionate, regardless of how long they last. You will find that as you pay attention to your kissing and let your mate know that you enjoy kissing them, you will both feel better about your relationship.

24. Be Kind to One Another

Unbelievably, kindness is often over simplified. Even good relationships can lack acts of kindness. This refers to “Do unto others ” Simple acts of kindness can have huge impacts on a relationship. If your husband or boyfriend is out working on the car on a hot summer day, make a thermos of ice-cold tea and take it to him, giving him a gentle kiss. If your wife or girlfriend has been working at the computer all day, walk up behind her and massage her shoulders and neck. You get the idea. Kindness means looking at the other person’s situation and seeing what you can do or add to that situation to make it better or easier. This is a way to validate your respect for each other. Kindness will go a long way in a relationship.

25. Special Hobby

Find some type of hobby that you both enjoy and then do it together. It might be that you both love refurbishing furniture. Turn this into an adventure of going to estate sales together to find nice pieces of furniture and then refurbishing them as a team. Another option would be if you have both wanted to learn how to ballroom or salsa dance. Take lessons together so you can then go out on the town and dance the night away. This is a great way to make your relationship even stronger while adding in something fun that you both enjoy.

26. Listen – Really Listen

Get into a habit of listening to what your mate is saying. Not the kind of listening that you do when you go out or sit at the dinner table, but a different kind of listening. Have you ever overheard your mate make a comment to a friend or family member about something they really want or want to do? Maybe you heard your boyfriend or husband tell a friend that they would love a certain tool. For no reason whatsoever, make a special effort to get that for him. You might have heard your girlfriend or wife mention a spa that they would love to try. Again,

without any reason, surprise her. This shows that your mate is really paying attention to things important to you.

27. **Be a Kid**

Do not be a prude. There is absolutely no reason why couples at any age cannot get into tickling matches or wrestle on the floor. Do not allow your relationship to grow old and stale. Understand and accept that it is perfectly fine to be silly from time to time. If you have nothing special planned on a Friday night, rent a few games, order in Chinese, plug in the Play Station, and play games.

28. **All Decked Out**

Although most people do not get dressed formally to go out, as a special treat, find an upscale restaurant, the opera, or even a ball, where the man can wear a tuxedo and the woman an evening gown. If possible, rent a limousine and have a bottle of champagne chilling before you get in. You will both feel good about yourselves and spending this magical evening together. This is something unique that brings another unexpected twist into the relationship, which keeps things interesting and alive. The two of you will have a romantic night that you will never forget.

29. **Showing Love**

Although hearing the words, "I love you" is special and important, sometimes you wish you could tell your mate as well as hear from your mate those words, but in special and unique ways. Here are some ideas of how this can be accomplished:

- Rent his favorite movie, even if it is something you do not like, and plan an evening alone where you can be with him as he enjoys his special treat.
- When he gets out of the shower, hand him a warm, cozy towel just heated in the dryer.
- When you make him pancakes, first pour the words, "I Love You" on the griddle and cook for a minute to brown. Then, pour more batter over the words to create a round pancake. The result will be a pancake displaying those three special words when you flip it over.
- While he is out of town, wash his car and surprise him by picking him up in a clean, shiny car at the airport.
- Take him out to lunch.
- Have his favorite breakfast on the table along with the morning newspaper.
- Instead of bugging him to go to the grocery store with you, let him stay home.
- Display your favorite picture of the two of you on the refrigerator.
- Buy him a subscription to his favorite magazine.

30. Split the Responsibility

Whether dating or married, weekends are always full of errands and chores. If you find that on the weekend things are lopsided, help your mate out. For example, if there are kids involved and one has a soccer game while the other has a baseball game, at the same time, offer to take one of the kids and your mate take the other. Make this a special time by packing a special lunch or snacks. Perhaps one of you has company coming and the house needs to be cleaned, laundry done, and groceries purchased. Set aside something you need done and offer to pitch in to help. Simply say you want to help and ask which of the jobs you can take over. This gesture will show your mate that you really care by sacrificing your time.

31. Love Means Having to Say You Are Sorry

If you make a mistake by doing or saying something that is hurtful or damaging to the relationship, say that you are sorry. Many people struggle with these words, even when they know that what they did was wrong. It actually takes a strong person to apologize. Do not wait until you think you have the courage but say it immediately, and with sincerity. Too often when couples argue, there is a long period of silence, which actually makes the anger and tension worse. You need to let your mate know immediately that you made a mistake and ask for forgiveness.

32. Be Yourself

Do not be phony in your relationship, trying to be someone or something different as a way to please your mate. For a relationship to work, both people need to be themselves and react to things naturally. Just imagine if you are really kind of on the silly side, enjoying life to the fullest. Then you meet a wonderful person who is much more conservative than you are. Because you are attracted to them, you try to squelch your normal vibrant personality. You are miserable and eventually, the person is going to be exposed to the “real” you. You have to base any relationship on honesty or it will eventually fall apart.

33. Maintain Your Health

You might think – what does good health have to do with a good relationship? In reality, it has a lot to do with it. Having a good relationship means having the energy to enjoy getting out and doing things together. To do that, it is important to eat right. When people are tired, they become short-tempered and frustrated. For this reason, it is important to get the right amount of sleep. Good exercise keeps your body in shape for being adventurous together. Taking care of your body and mind will flow over into your relationship and make you a calmer, stronger, and better-balanced person.

34. Compliment – A Lot

Be generous with compliments. It is very common for people to notice something nice about another person and think about it internally, but never voice it. When in a relationship, compliments are like glue. They hold the couple's attention and respect. Make sure your compliments are genuine and based on something you see or hear your mate do. If you have a clogged garbage disposal and your boyfriend or husband is able to unclog it, compliment them on being handy. If your girlfriend or wife takes her mother to the doctor, compliment her on her generosity. The fact is that criticism is destructive and can very quickly tear a relationship apart. Just like the cliché, "If you do not have something nice to say, then do not say anything at all." This is very true – take notice of the good things your mate does and make it known to them that you see and appreciate those things.

35. Realistic Expectations

No matter how wonderful and flawless your mate seems, no one is perfect. Be careful about putting someone on a pedestal, especially in the early stages of your relationship. Make sure that the expectations you have for your mate and yourself are realistic. There are going to be differences in opinion, and probably some disagreements. Also, do not assume that your mate knows how you feel or what you think about something. When discussing something important to you, ensure that you both understand the same thing. The reality is that neither one of you is going to know exactly what the other one needs. As long as you do not expect them to read your mind and accept that this is a part of getting to know one another and communicating, you will be fine.

36. Leave the Baggage Behind

Every person on the face of the Earth has some kind of history, or "baggage", although at varying levels. Do not walk into a relationship with your arms loaded with that baggage. The past is the past. Even though there are things from the past that are hurtful, and even damaging, learn from those things and come out a better and stronger person. This allows you to step into a new relationship with better knowledge of what *not* to do. Leave the baggage from the past alone, focus on today, and look forward to tomorrow.

37. Do Not Repeat, Do Not Repeat, Do Not Repeat

Learn from your mistakes. When something goes wrong and the two of you work through it, do not repeat the same mistake. Rather than dive right back into whatever it was you did or said, think before you act. At first, this will take some discipline but as you see positive results in the relationship, be encouraged that it is working.

38. Go on a Date

Especially for married couples, but even for some “dating” couples, start dating. Often people become very comfortable in their relationship and sitting around on the weekends, watching movies is about as exciting as it gets. Ask your mate out. For example, actually call them and ask, “If you do not have any plans for Saturday night, would you like to go to a concert with me?” It is crucial to relationships that they keep the fire alive by enjoying the act of dating. There are many people in long-term, successful marriages that will tell you they go out on dates every week, which has been a huge bonus for their relationship.

39. Memory Box

Start a memory box to store old movie tickets, brochures from cities visited, concert ticket stubs, old ski lift passes, cards attached to flowers received, old love notes or letters, birthday cards or anniversary cards from your mate, anything that the two of you did together. Every once in awhile, pull the box out and look at the items with your mate. Reminisce about each memento, and keep all the special times in your life close to your heart!

40. Keep the Kids Out of It

Whether married or dating, if there are kids involved, it is crucial that they are not used as pawns in any situation. For example, if your mate wants to get intimate and you are not in the mood, do not say, “I need to help the kids with their homework,” or if something that needed to be done was not taken care of because you forgot, do not blame it on the kids by saying, “I was taking care of the kids and did not have time.” In the first scenario, be honest with your mate and tell them that you are very tired and while intimacy is important, you would prefer to make sure the kids are in bed on time so the two of you can have some quality time together. This opens an honest line of communication and does not place ill feelings on the kids, especially since it is not their problem to begin with.

41. Listen to How You Talk

When working on your relationship, more than likely you and your mate have settled into a pattern of speaking to each other. It might be with short, blunt answers, heavy sighs as though bothered, or with negative remarks. Pay attention to not only your words spoken, but also the tone in which they are spoken. Be positive, cheery, and respond in a way that will confirm to your mate that you are listening and truly interested – that you have time to listen and communicate. In addition, add terms of endearment into your conversation. Instead of “Good morning,” try, “Hi honey, good morning!”

42. Making Love

Intimacy is a huge part of a successful relationship. Choose a book from the bookstore and try to bring a little excitement into your relationship. Do not be afraid to experiment and learn new and exciting ways to please each other. Keeping intimacy alive is healthy and not a bad thing whatsoever!

43. Turn the Computer Off

Often the computer becomes a replacement for a lack of something in the relationship. It might be just surfing, playing games, or getting involved with websites that promote pornography. If you notice that your mate is spending more and more time on the computer, take this as a sign that even if not doing anything wrong, they are choosing to spend the time with the computer instead of you. In other words, use this as a sign that something is missing in your relationship. Start by talking and searching to confirm what it is bothering your mate and then work on making it better!

44. Follow Tradition

Keep some tradition in your marriage, which relates to the vows you took and the fact that marriage is sacred. Treat each anniversary as a celebration of your love and the time spent together. Follow the traditional anniversary gifts and see how creative you can be. The first year anniversary gift is paper. One husband bought his wife a beautiful Chinese drawing on rice paper, signed by the artist, and had it framed for her. Make this fun, exciting, and keep traditions alive.

45. Control Your Anger

Every relationship has difficulties, and sometimes, there can be some intense arguments. For the sake of your relationship and the love you have for your mate, keep your anger in check. First, when people are angry, hurtful words fly, usually not even meant. However, after spoken, it is too late to take them back – the damage is done. Another problem with anger is that the word “divorce” can easily be thrown around. You may not mean it, but you know it hurts, thus making you the winner of the argument. NEVER talk about divorce in your relationship, even if just teasing. If you need to go to another room to cool off, and then do that, but whatever you do, do not allow your anger to take control of your relationship.

46. Financial Woes

One of the main reasons other than fidelity that marriages fall apart is due to finances. When couples are struggling with money problems, tempers flare, frustration builds, drinking may start, and it is an all-around unhealthy situation. The minute there are any signs of financial difficulties, the two of you need to immediately sit down and figure out a plan on how to deal with the problem. If

needed, go to see a financial consultant or a credit counseling service to help you get back on track. Do not allow your finances to get out of line or your relationship will certainly suffer.

47. **I Forgive You**

If something has happened in your relationship causing the trust to waiver, you will have many things to work through. When your mate has done something that requires you to forgive, you have to forgive, REALLY forgive. Once you have worked through the issue either together or with professional counseling, and you tell them that you forgive them, you can never hold that over them again. As an example, if your mate has had an affair and the two of you choose to work it out rather than throw the relationship away, once the problems are resolved and the forgiveness is said, it is done! This means that you cannot stalk your mate to ensure they are where they said they would be, call or page them throughout the day, constantly ask for reaffirmation of your relationship, it means that you forgive and put the past behind you and then move on in a new, strong, and healthy relationship. It will not be easy, but you can do it with the right help, attitude, and commitment.

48. **Fighting No-No**

While having disagreements is normal and sometimes when controlled, healthy for relationships, the place and degree of discussion are important. Keep your disagreements private. Being at a party or anywhere around family or friends and breaking into an argument is a great way to break down a relationship. Not only does it cause embarrassment for your mate, but it also puts a negative light on both of you from the people witnessing the fight. If you are in public and think you need to argue, at least find a quiet corner or separate room where you can discuss whatever it is bothering you.

49. **Strong Family Ties**

When in a relationship, not only are you involved with the love of your life, but also the family of your mate. It is important to build a strong, healthy relationship with the families as well. Even if you do not see them often, having a good connection with your mate's family will make life for everyone much better all the way around.

50. **Mentoring**

If you know of another couple from work or your church that has been married for many years and continued to have a strong relationship, ask them if they would mentor you. Being around positive influences and watching someone who leads by example is a great way to learn how to have a good relationship for yourself.

51. 12-Month Calendar

As a special gift, have a 12-month calendar created with pictures of special times spent between the two of you. Arrange the pictures to coordinate with the months and then as a Christmas or birthday gift, or just as a special surprise, present it to your loved one.

52. Something Handmade

You do not have to be a world-renowned artist to make something homemade and special for the love of your life. Even making a special, personalized greeting card would be appreciated and show your mate that you care enough to take the time needed to make something by hand.

53. Favorite Meal

If your mate has a meal, that is by far the favorite above everything else, go all out and prepare everything to order. Before they arrive home, put on something nice and a little sexy, light some candles, and have a wonderful surprise waiting.

54. Trip to the Pound

If you and your mate love animals, take a trip to the local animal shelter and pick out a dog or cat that needs a good home. Adopting an animal that needs a home can be a wonderful way to have something that you both can care for and love together. This will open up for long walks, taking your new dog on a walk, or hours of playing with a sweet and funny cat.

55. Day at the Movies

Have a movie marathon some rainy or cold Saturday. Put all your errands and chores on hold and head to your nearest theater. Hit three or four movies and mix it up. Buy the theater popcorn and drinks but sneak your own candy in. This is a great way to spend some fun time together, holding hands or cuddling, while sharing some laughs and maybe tears watching a variety of flicks.

56. A Walk in the Park

Spending quality time together where you can talk and just enjoy each other's company is critical to a good relationship. Plan a nice walk in the park to include a comfortable blanket to sit on the grass with while having a good old-fashioned picnic. Take this time talk, watch other people with their kids, and then just walk around, hand-in-hand.

57. Name a Star

As a special gift, ask your mate to join you outside at night when the sky is black and the stars shining brightly. Point up to the universe and state, "See that star over there? That is your star. I bought it for you." Then present them with the certificate showing that they do in fact have a star named after them. This wonderful gift will last a lifetime!

58. Coupon Book

Create a coupon book filled with any number you like of 20-minute massages. One day when least expected, when your mate comes dragging in the door tired after a long, hard day at work, present this along with a gentle kiss. Although you are the one offering the massages, if you remain faithful to your coupons and never grumble, your love life will more than likely be enhanced and before long, your mate will be the one giving you massages.

59. Dinner by the Fire

Order in some of your favorite food, open a bottle of fine wine, light some candles, and lay out a cozy blanket in front of a roaring fire. Enjoy feeding each other food, sneaking little kisses in between. This wonderful romantic moment will help build your relationship even stronger. This kind of gesture shows your mate that you really want something special from your relationship and that spending quality time together is a priority.

60. Scavenger Hunt

If things have been a little stressed in your relationship, do something extra special. Start by creating a trail of rose petals from the door to the kitchen where your mate will find a note to go to the bedroom. In the bedroom, have another note next to an overnight bag telling them to meet you at a specific hotel restaurant where you know the ambience is cozy and romantic. The note should direct them to ask for you at the restaurant where you will be waiting to enjoy a fine dinner together. After dinner and cocktails, gently lead your mate by the hand to a beautiful room that you have reserved for the night. There on the bed is a robe and a red rose. This will do more for your relationship than you can imagine.

61. Photo Album

As a wonderful keepsake, create a photo album for your mate. Include the parents or siblings to come up with some special childhood and teenage pictures. Include family, friends, special occasions, and times of the two of you together. Whenever the two of you feel as though you are drifting apart or taking one another for granted, pull out the photo album as a reminder of the incredible person in your life.

62. The Art of Gift Giving

Everyone loves to be given a gift, especially as a surprise or “just because.” Just remember while giving gifts is a beautiful thing to do for the person you love, there are five key essentials for making your mate know that you are giving just because you love them. First, put some thought into the gift. Do not just pick up something at the last minute so you are not empty handed. Second, make the effort. Even if you have a busy schedule, be sure to schedule time to shop. Third, give with the right attitude. You give because you appreciate and love, not because you want something back. Fourth, plan what you are going to give. Find something that is important for your mate and not necessarily to you. Finally, add the element of surprise into the gift giving. Using this equation is sure to impress your mate and leave a lasting impression.

63. Family History

Perform some extensive research on your mate’s family history, which will involve some help from the family, and create a website especially for your mate’s family where they can share information, pictures, family recipes, and more! This will take some time and planning but very little money. Myfamily.com is a great site that is extremely reasonable. This will not only touch your mate’s heart, but the hearts of the entire family.

64. A Day at the Spa

For couples where the mother or father stays home and takes care of the children all day long, show your appreciation for the hard work that takes. Hire a babysitter for about four hours and give your mate a gift certificate to a local spa where they can enjoy a relaxing massage, mineral springs, sauna, mud wrap, or whatever special treatments are available.

65. Charity

Find a charity that you would both like to contribute to and give something special in both names. For example, if there is a synergy house near where you live for unwed mothers, go in together and purchase a crib or baby clothes. Another option would be if a local park needs donations, find out what kind of trees they need and purchase a tree together. Make this something special where you go shop together and then present together. These types of kind acts are great for bringing couples closer together and help both people love and appreciate each other even more for their kindness.

66. Thunderstorms

While some people find thunderstorms to be scary, they can also be viewed as being romantic. If you have having a thunderstorm in your area, without putting

yourself in harm's way, sit out on your porch if the storm is still off in the distance, or cuddled on the couch near a large window and just watch the lightening together.

67. **Take Pride in Yourself**

Every relationship goes through down time. Just because the flame has become a mild flicker, that does not mean you have lost the love for each other, it just means you need to add a little fuel to the fire. When couples have been together for a long time, the makeup comes off, the nice clothes turn into oversized sweats and tee shirts, and instead of cuddling on the sofa or floor, one sits on the couch and the other in the recliner. Step back in time and start getting dressed up more on the weekends, invite your mate to sit with you on the couch, dance together in your living room to some music, or take a walk, hand in hand. It is important not to let yourself go, even when your relationship reaches a "comfortable" state. By taking pride in yourself means that you take pride in your relationship.

68. **No Jealousy Allowed**

To have a healthy relationship, caring and concern are fine but when those emotions change into jealousy, this could be the beginning of trouble. Trust is probably the number one element needed in order to have a strong relationship. Without trust, things will quickly deteriorate. If one of you masters something special, receives a promotion at work, or achieves some great feat, there could be a small spark of jealousy on the other person's side. You need to talk about this and ensure that any feelings of inadequacies are permanently put to rest. Every person needs assurance at some time or another and as long as you can communicate, things will be fine. However, if your mate becomes withdrawn or irritated, these could be signs that more is going on. Once jealousy enters a relationship, problems are soon to follow.

69. **Keep in Touch**

If you are in a relationship, where your mate serves in the armed forces and is overseas or in another state on duty, away in a foreign country for school, or separated from you for one reason or another, it is important that you keep in touch with each other often. There will be stress from the separation but by keeping in touch and informing each other of the things each person is dealing with, how they feel, etc., you will not have any break in your communication. The goal is that when you get back together, you can easily pick up where you left off. This is a very important time to provide each other with confirmation of your love and validation of your relationship. While this will require some extra effort on both parts, keep in mind that the separation is not forever.

70. Host a Halloween Party

Instead of just passing out candy for Halloween, organize a masquerade party together where everyone is required to come dressed up. Include in your party food, drinks, door prizes, and games. Have a few friends provide help you plan this and then go all out. Choose costumes the two of you can wear to enhance each other. A few suggestions would be to Adam and Eve (wearing skin-toned clothing – no nudity), Batman and Batgirl, Cleopatra and Marc Anthony, Romeo and Juliet, Robin Hood and Maid Marian, or Sonny and Cher. You will have a blast with the planning and searching out your costumes. This type of party is great for good laughs and fond memories of each other, which are important for a good relationship.

71. Special Music

Select numerous songs that your mate would enjoy and have them either recorded on a cassette or burned on a CD that can be enjoyed while driving to and from work. To add a little spice, record a few secret messages every few songs just reminding them how much you love and appreciate them.

72. New Adventures

Arrange for the two of you to try something new *together*. If you are both the athletic type, enter yourselves into some type of physical competition. If the two of you like the fine arts, audition for roles in a local community theater. Perhaps you like to travel. If so, arrange for a short trip to some place exotic that you have never been before.

73. Adopt a Family

When the Christmas holiday starts getting closer, locate a family together from your church or local charity services that needs to be adopted for Christmas. Together, shop for the gifts, and have the family over for the most scrumptious holiday dinner. You will both appreciate what you have even more as well as your own special relationship.

74. Getting Married

If your relationship has moved to a set wedding date and the countdown has started, do something unique and fun. Visit a candy store and have 30-miniature candy hearts made, each with a special message of love. Each day, present your mate with the appropriate candy heart. As you get down to the final days before the wedding, they might read something like, “Only two more days”, “Tomorrow: The Big Day”, “I love you, your wife (or husband).”

75. Motivate Each Other

Find a mutual incentive that will motivate both of you to being the best you can be. Find something that you can both be excited about and then attach some type of reward to the motivation. If one of you has had a dream of writing a screenplay, make that your goal and take that on together. The motivation is that when finished, the two of you will take a beautiful, romantic weekend vacation to some exotic place. The goal could be anything that is important to one person or both and that can be worked toward completion together. Another example would be if your mate has always dreamed of buying an old model car and restoring it do it together and then take a special trip to the Indy 500 as your reward. Yet another example might be to restore a home. Make this a joint project and then as a reward, add a Jacuzzi into your plans. Use your imagination and enjoy the venture together.

76. Embrace Change

There is no relationship on the face of the planet that goes for years and years without change. People change as they mature and view life differently, therefore reacting differently. Rather than get upset with each other over change, embrace change. You may not always like the changes that happen, but do not throw away a perfectly good relationship just because the trail starts to wind. Be patient and encourage new directions while being honest about concerns that might arise.

77. Reap What You Sow

This is an old saying that goes back a very long way but it still holds true today. If you sow love, forgiveness, faithfulness, encouragement, honesty, and acceptance, then that is what you will reap. It is definitely true that what you put into a relationship is what you get back.

78. Board Games

Pick a night, perhaps on a cold winter night, and just enjoy playing board games. This can be with just the two of you, or with several close friends. Bring out the snacks, beverages, and just have some fun. Laughter and fun are important factors in any relationship, for any age. Laugh and enjoy having a good time with good honest fun! You will truly be amazed at what this can do for your relationship.

79. No Interference

Do not allow other people to interfere with your relationship. If family members try to get in the middle of fights or debates, that is definite trouble. You might have friends with well-meant intentions trying to help you and your mate solve problems. Although getting another person's perspective is not a bad thing, make sure it is

when you ask for it. It is very important to keep integrity in your relationship and not allow people to interfere.

80. **Adore your Mate**

Beyond telling your mate that you love them, that they are special, and having passion in your relationship, you should adore your mate and what they bring into the relationship. What that means is to appreciate and love them for the person they are, faults and all. This is true devotion to your mate and demonstration that you do not take them for granted.

81. **Follow Your Instincts**

When things are going in a wrong direction, often people will simply keep going in the same direction while hoping that things work themselves out. The result is usually negative. Instead, listen to your gut feelings, your inner instincts. If you believe that something is bothering your mate or not right in your relationship, keep it between you and your mate and work things out as a couple.

82. **Be Creative**

The words, "I love you," are always welcomed but why not add some creativity to the way you tell your mate you love them. Rent a billboard in a location where you know your mate drives every day that clearly says, "I love you," request that your mate's radio station play a special song and message on his or her way to work, or if celebrating a special anniversary, have a skywriter fly by a ball stadium, park, or somewhere special where you are spending quality time together outdoors.

83. **Make Eye Contact**

You may not think this is important, but think back to the first time you saw your now mate. More than likely, the first interaction was through eye contact. If you are having dinner during the holidays with a large group of family and friends, glance over to your mate and give them a seductive wink, or if your mate is giving a speech and you are there to offer support, attentively look at them, making directly eye contact and offer a warm reassuring smile. Eyes can say a lot!

84. **Learn More about Your Mate**

Either find a good questionnaire or create one that does not dig up the past, but focuses on discovering other qualities about each other. One happily married couple did this and the wife, who had been standing by her husband for more than 10 years, discovered that he used to be a competitive ice skater. She had no idea. Guess what they did on Saturday?

85. Change Routines

Understand that every once in a while, it is important to throw an exciting curve into your relationship. If you are in a routine for example of offering your mate a quick peck on the lips before you part ways for the day, try adding a soft, gentle kiss on the neck. You can be assured that throughout the day, that change in routine, is what will be on your mate's mind.

86. Dance

Finding a nice place where the two of you can enjoy a slow dance is a great way to spend time together, holding each other without saying a word. Keep in mind that to accomplish this, you can stay home and simply move some furniture out of the way, light some candles, and put on your favorite soft music and enjoy some quiet, romantic time together.

87. Sunrise/Sunset

Too often people miss the beautiful miracle of a sunrise or sunset. Schedule time to get up early one morning with a thermos of hot coffee or cappuccino and find a quiet place where the two of you can go just to watch the sun rise or set. Appreciate what nature has to offer and share it with each other.

88. Explorations

Find something they you are both interested in exploring and do it together. For example, if you live in a place where there are caves, make a day of driving around and exploring caves. Be sure to take the right equipment and safety precautions but this puts you both in a position of trusting each other and discovering something new and exciting together.

89. To Tell or Not to Tell

Experts will disagree on how much of a person's past should be shared in a relationship and while some things probably should be shared, most people lean more to not sharing every aspect of the past. First, it is the past. Think back to how much people grow through the teen years to mid-twenties. Offering unnecessary information from the past is a great way to create distrust, insecurity, and more questions than answers. Be wise when sharing.

90. Respect Privacy

When two people come together in a relationship, each person has their own set of history. There are yearbooks, maybe love letters from a first love, other objects that may not seem important to one person but to the owner, they have a special meaning. It is important to respect the privacy of your mate's "stuff." Do not dig

through boxes of things owned by your mate out of curiosity. Instead, allow them to bring those things out if they feel it is necessary. By helping yourself, you are disrespecting something sacred to your mate, which is not healthy for any relationship.

91. **No Place for Abuse**

Regardless of how much you love your mate and believe in who they are, there is NEVER an appropriate time for abuse, whether physical, emotional, or verbal. If your mate shows aggression or any form of abuse toward you, seek counseling for both of you immediately to try to work through things. If your mate refuses to go, even if it is hard, leave. First is your safety. Second, it is possible for people to learn ways in which to manage their aggressions. If this is the case, the life of the relationship has a much better chance of surviving!

92. **Open Your Eyes**

Do not drive yourself crazy with this, but take notice of how your relationship is going. Open your eyes and take stock of what is and is not working in your relationship. Are there definite things missing or definite problem areas that need to be worked on? Think about it. If you invest in the stock market, you pay attention to what is going on so you can make changes if needed. Your relationship is far more than the stock market but requires some of the same strategies.

93. **The Grass is NOT Greener!**

Too many times, people get tired of working on the relationship they are currently in and feel that by moving on to another person, they will find greener pastures. This is just not the case. What happens is when you move to another person, things are fresh, new, and exciting just as they were in the beginning of your current relationship. Within time, that relationship will also start experiencing differences and bumps in the road. Unless you are being abused or your mate is doing something illegal or completely irresponsible, perhaps the efforts you would put into starting a new relationship would be better spent fixing the one you have.

94. **Start a Journal**

Keep your personal feelings and discoveries about your mate in a journal. This will help to remember what special things he or she likes or dislikes, track the wonderful times spent together, and help you to feel better when you hit an obstacle in your relationship. When things get a little tough, refer to your journal and read through all the terrific emotions and time together and you will find plenty of reasons to make things right again.

95. **Be Flexible**

Remember that relationships are give and take situations, not competition between two people who love each other. There will be times when your mate is right and times when you are right. When you feel the conversation getting a little on the edgy side with each of you trying to hold ground, do not forget that there can be many ways to accomplish the same task. The result is that each of you might learn something new from the other person. Put your heads together and do what makes the most sense instead of battling for ownership of the solution.

96. **Cut out the Excuses**

A major turn-off in many situations, not only relationships, is people who have an excuse for everything. Forget that. Do not make excuses in fear of your mate not liking, loving, or respecting you. Be yourself and if you messed up with something, just admit to it. Say you had promised to make dinner, got home exhausted, and just did not feel like making it, do not tell your mate, "I had to work overtime." Be honest and say, "You know, I got home after a busy day and I was too tired. What sounds better, Chinese or Pizza?" This has taken you out of the situation of lying and reconfirmed your honest nature to your mate.

97. **Spirituality**

Statistics show that couples that spend time in church together usually have strong relationships. Bringing spirituality into your relationship is important. Allow the love of God to be your ultimate guide and spend time having devotions together at night. If you are just starting out dating, religious preference may not seem like a big deal at first, but soon into the relationship, it can be a big trouble spot. Make time for God in your life and consider dating someone who shares the same faith!

98. **Learn to be Successful**

Many couples are starting to go to counseling or relationship/marriage classes much earlier in their relationship rather than waiting until after the marriage is in trouble. This is a great option for learning how to have a healthy, lasting relationship and develop open communication.

99. **Work and Home Do Not Mingle**

How many times have you heard this? It is true. While sharing experiences about your day with your mate is perfectly normal, living your work at home is not. If you have to bring work home, set a specific amount of time it will take you to complete, let your mate know, and then when quitting time comes, quit! It is important to separate the two parts of your life and keep your work at the job, and when at home, pay attention to your mate and/or family.

100. Encourage Friendships

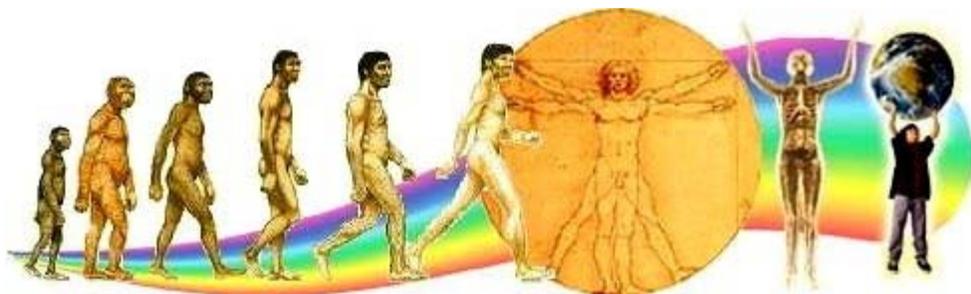
Men, unlike women, have a more difficult time in developing close friendships with other men. This is a natural part of life and while they may have some buddies from high school or college that they see on occasion, rarely do they set specific time aside just for friends. Men and women both need an outlet outside of the relationship where they can just “let their guard down” and have some fun with the same gender. As your mate makes new friendships, encourage that growth and show 100% support!

101. Confidentiality

Women are usually blessed with the gift of gab, making it easy, sometimes too easy, to talk to other people. Keep information shared to you by your mate in 100% confidence. Unless they have told you of a crime they have committed, they are confiding in you and placing full trust in your relationship. All it takes is one time of spilling private information for the entire relationship to suffer.

As you can see, relationships take work. However, with the right attitude, a lot of hard work, and some unique ideas on how to make it successful, couples can have a strong, lifelong relationship!

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Why Do Personal Development?

Part of the nature of humans is to be constantly developing, growing and moving toward a balanced and mature way of being. Our present personality is determined by both who and what we have been and by the person we strive to become. The goal of personal development is to learn and apply that which enables us to attain emotional wellbeing, understanding and effectiveness, and to share this knowledge with others.

Personal development is the conscious evolution of human nature, and yet throughout history it has been sorely lacking! Although it is in our nature to learn and grow, we are held back by our culture, which is predominantly focused on survival needs, each of us in competition with others, and our spiritual inner nature is repressed. The animal rules. We make no room for unconditional love.

Even though the culture may have evolved with technological advancement and administrative complexity, human nature has not moved forward as it might. We are now paying the price for human selfishness and inconsideration. Going forward, the quality of our lives on this planet - even our survival - now depends on each of us taking responsibility for our personal growth.

The human being needs to awaken to the soul that inhabits each body and is our true self and source of inner knowing. Awaken through a process of self-discovery, leading to one's own, self-directed spirituality. We need to become mindfully conscious instead of ruled by the dictates of instincts, past habits and fixed beliefs. We need to throw away dogma, open our minds and reconsider. Instead of fear about our survival and competitive angst, we will then be motivated by compassionate understanding and creative love.

For those that do move forward, the next epoch - that is almost upon us as we move into 2012 - will be a celebration of human cooperation and shared love. It's our best hope for the future - and it's in our hands.

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