

Relationship Success

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Valentine's Day serves as an annual reminder to show your partner you care or, at the very least, to let them know you are *aware* you still have a partner. But showing your partner how much you care should involve more than a box of chocolate once a year. Here are three quick tips to show your appreciation and improve your relationship every day of the year (and none of them involve hearts or bows).

1. Catch your partner doing something right.

It's easy to get caught up in being critical of what your partner says or does. But if you find yourself only saying negative or critical comments to your partner, your partner may feel as if nothing they do is ever good, which can affect their self-esteem or damage the closeness in your relationship. Although it is much harder to recognize and acknowledge what your partner is doing that you actually like, doing so rewards your partner and teaches them more about your preferences. Research by Gottman has found that couples in happy marriages make at least five times as many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship as negative ones. Point out at least one thing a day your partner has done that has led you to feel cared about, helped, or understood.

2. Let yourself be influenced by your partner.

There's an old saying: Nothing is as dangerous as an idea when it is the only one you have. Some couples spend an enormous amount of energy trying to convince each other their point of view is "right" and their partner's point of view is "wrong." When both partners approach a conversation this way, nothing gets accomplished except damaging the closeness in the relationship. By consistently engaging in this pattern, you are essentially choosing being "right" over satisfaction and happiness in your relationship. The next time you find yourself trying to convince your partner your way is the only way, take a step back and allow yourself to hear and consider your partner's point of view.

3. Raise your partner's priority on your to-do list.

As you allow your schedule to become more and more packed, something has to give and that something typically is time alone with your partner. Try to designate alone time as a couple every week. By setting aside time for just the two of you every week, you are sending the message that your partner is important to you, and are allowing time for maintaining emotional connection. By minimizing distractions (e.g., turning off the television, putting your cell phone on silent), you are letting your partner know you value the time you have together.