



Love & Romance: Tending Your Relationship

A relationship needs tending. Just as a garden needs sunshine, good soil, and water to grow, a relationship needs certain basic elements and ongoing attention.



Relationships often weather life's hardships, struggles, and day-to-day responsibilities, but it is easy to forget to laugh, talk and make time for romance. Without these types of shared moments, the space between two people in a relationship can become an empty void rather than an opportunity to nurture love and romance. To tend to your relationship, consider the following:

Make time. The days are busy and stressful and we feel pulled in so many directions that we often don't realize how little positive attention we give our relationship. Positive attention goes beyond discussing bills or who will shuttle the kids to school. Instead, it means making time to purposefully focus on each other in a positive manner. Try setting aside some time consistently each day or each week to spend some alone time together, even if it is only for 15 minutes a day or an hour each week.

Communicate. Of all the factors that influence a relationship's growth, the most important is communication. Good communication isn't easy. It requires concentration and energy. We must decide to listen and then be willing to be quiet, to maintain eye contact, to be open, and learn to give feedback by paraphrasing, which is the technique of restating what you are hearing from the other person.

Be assertive. Assertiveness facilitates communication and is a critical component of a healthy, growing relationship. Guidelines for assertive behavior include: asking specifically for what you want, knowing that you – as well as your opinions, values, and feelings – are entirely worthy at this moment; and being open-minded and tolerant of your partner's opinions and desires.

Realize how you connect. Simply spending time together doesn't always nurture a connection. Find out what you need to feel connected to your significant other, and vice versa. Perhaps it is talking about how you feel, participating in an activity (see below), or through intimate physical contact.

Try something new. Take turns picking a new activity and have fun! Try to find activities that are new to both of you, like dance lessons, pottery or rowing. Shared experiences not only create lasting memories, they also allow a couple to discover new territories and challenges while having some fun along the way.

Treat others the way you want to be treated. If you want your significant other to be more romantic or considerate, be sure you are giving what you want to receive. Sometimes it is easier to focus on what we are not getting rather than what we are not giving.

Speaking of romance... the small things count! Romance is the intentional act of being thoughtful and loving—it doesn't need to involve money or time away. Instead, it could mean a few special words written on the bathroom mirror or the offer of a massage to ease the strain of a stressful day.

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