

Keep Love Alive: 5 Simple Steps to Strengthen Your Relationship

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

It seems that everywhere you turn nowadays, experts are offering you relationship help or love advice. Well, if that's what you're looking for, read on. What follows are simple ways to strengthen your relationship. In fact, they're so simple and so commonsensical that you might fall into the trap of thinking that they won't really offer your marriage or relationship what it needs. I ask you to suspend this cynicism and take a leap of faith. In my work with couples, I've seen simple steps make an enormous difference—but patience is needed.

It's no secret that modern life is fast-paced and getting faster every day. In this world, relationships—and all the work they require—can easily be seen as inefficient, time-consuming and simply not gratifying enough. For your relationship to have a healthy chance at survival, you must take steps to nurture the simple, loving aspects of your union.

Here are 5 simple steps you can use to improve your marriage/relationship:

1. Share the trivialities of life

Think back to a time when your relationship was new. What did you and your partner talk about? Probably anything and everything. The excitement of new love propels us to share even the smallest details of our day. Unfortunately that level of sharing often dwindles as relationships mature and responsibilities mount. Focus on the *act* of sharing to refuel intimacy. The simple act itself is more important than the specifics of what is shared. So make it a habit to share the trivialities of your day with your partner.

2. Communicate through touch

Touch is a powerful way to communicate affection and foster intimacy. Whether you're sitting across from each other at the dinner table or next to each other on the sofa, make the effort to increase the amount you touch one another. Touch also has a calming effect on our bodies, so if you want to create a relaxed, loving atmosphere and make your partner feel special, lean into each other the next time you're at the movies or watching TV.

3. Hellos and good-byes

Greeting your partner and saying good-bye are quick and easy to do but are often overlooked in the chaos of hectic schedules. A warm, expressive greeting can set the stage for the entire day. An affectionate "good-bye" allows you and your partner to emotionally hold on to loving feelings while separated from each other. You'd be surprised how often couples skip this simple way to book-end their days. It may seem easier to put all your morning energies into catching the 7:15 train and overlook taking the time to stop, make eye contact with your partner and genuinely wish him/her a good day. Don't fall into this trap.

4. Learn to laugh together

Shared laughter is a surefire way to keep the connection with your partner vibrant. When you laugh, you're tapping into the playful energy that transcends life's stresses. When you and your partner make each other laugh, this energy feeds intimacy and life becomes a little less daunting. Make time for mutual playfulness and make fun of life's absurdities —this will help you both cope with stress, develop perspective and achieve a greater sense of togetherness.

5. Show your appreciation

It's human nature to want to be recognized for the things we do. When you express gratitude, your partner receives the message that you are thankful and are not taking him/her for granted. An atmosphere of appreciation will create positive feelings and deepen your connection. Don't fall prey to the expectation-mindset, where you start to believe that your partner is *supposed* to do all the things s/he does and therefore doesn't need to be thanked for them—this mindset creates a dangerous atmosphere of complacency that erodes intimacy.

These five loving acts don't take much time and don't cost a dime—but the payoff is huge. Pick one of these behaviors and make it a daily habit. And remember the virtue of patience—slowly but surely you will be taking steps to protect your marriage or relationship from the fast-paced tempo of life.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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