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Bringing Out The Best in Your Relationship

By Kali Munro, M.Ed., Psychotherapist

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Note: Ideally, these guidelines work best when both partners follow them; however, a change in one partner's way of responding often encourages a change in the other partner.

Relationships bring out the best and the worst in us. Here are some ways to bring out the best in yours:

1. Focus on yourself.

Do things to increase your self-awareness, like how you behave in relationships. It can help to stay aware of patterns, reactions, feelings, beliefs, and triggers (from your childhood and previous relationships) that arise in your relationship. It is often true that how you feel may have little to do with your partner, and is more about you and your past experiences.

2. Take responsibility for your own feelings, thoughts, needs, and behaviour.

Use "I" statements ("I feel..." vs. "You make me feel...")

Check out assumptions, interpretations, and fears.

State your feelings and thoughts clearly and without blame.

Make requests. Ask for what you need. She/he may not know what you need.

Know that you may not get exactly what you need.

Find ways to meet your own needs.

3. Take care of yourself.

Treat yourself as you would a good friend.

4. Be present with yourself.

This is important not only for your own well-being, but also for your relationship. Being present with yourself can be achieved in different ways, such as meditation, yoga, relaxation, rest, exercise, body awareness, dance, being in nature, and prayer. Anything that helps you to be in the moment will help you to do that with your partner, as well. Many people find that being in the moment while they are with their partner is a lot harder than when they are alone or with other people. Some couples work on this

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together. You can:

Lie down with your partner in a spoon position (one person's front side hugs the other person's back side) and then breathe in unison for five to ten minutes. Generally it is better if the larger partner follows the breath of the smaller partner. If your mind wanders, bring your focus back to breathing together. Variations of this are standing up and breathing in unison while hugging, and sitting down facing each other, holding eye contact while breathing in unison. This can also be helpful to do when you feel upset or angry with each other.

Sit facing each other. At first, look down or close your eyes. Become aware of your breath. Follow the natural rhythm of your breath, and let your mind be clear of thoughts and worries. When you have done this for a while, open your eyes and look at your partner. S/he may not have opened her/his eyes yet. If

not, look at your partner from this meditative place and see what you notice, while you continue to follow your breath. When your partner opens her/his eyes, hold eye contact, while continuing to follow your breath. If you lose your connection with your breath, take a moment by looking down or closing your eyes to reconnect, and then hold eye contact again. Just notice what you are aware of as you do this.

5. Nurture all of your relationships.

Try not to isolate yourself in your primary relationship.

6. Explore your own creativity, needs, independence, leisure activities, hobbies, career

Anything that makes you feel better about yourself, or makes you feel whole and feeds your soul is important and will have a positive effect on your relationship.

7. Take another look.

When your partner does something that bothers you,

Ask yourself, what does this mean to me? Why am I bothered by this? Is there anything from my past that is effecting how I am feeling or seeing this right now? Have I in any way contributed to this issue, perhaps without being aware of it? Is there anything about this issue that might reflect something I don't want to look at within me?

If you are feeling critical or judgmental about your partner's behaviour, step back for a moment and see if you can come up with alternative explanations for that behaviour—ones that are less critical.

If you need to say something, this is a helpful formula to use: When you...(describe behaviour in neutral terms), I feel...(describe feelings without blaming), and I would like to ask that you...(make your request about a concrete behavioural change).

8. Give understanding.

Just as you deserve understanding and support, your partner does, too, and it does help to feel understood. Try to see the situation from her/his perspective, especially when you are in conflict.

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9. Acknowledge your partner's feelings.

You don't have to agree with someone to acknowledge and understand how they feel.

10. Give your partner lots of appreciation.

Let your partner know how much you love her/him and why.

11. Accept your partner the way she/he is.

This doesn't mean that you don't ask her/him for behavioural changes, or that you accept, for example, being yelled at. It just means that you accept your partner as a person, and believe in her/his good intentions. Contrary to popular belief, really accepting someone brings out the best in them.

12. Don't make sweeping generalizations.

No matter how tempting, try not to make sweeping generalizations like "You never...", "You are always...", "You are such a..." Besides the fact that they are not true (no one does the same thing all the time, in every situation), they are hurtful statements that leave people feeling bad about themselves, and can feed into a lack of motivation for change. "If I never do anything right, why bother?"

13. Have complaint sessions.

Sometimes couples build up resentments that need airing. It can help to have a "complaint session." One person starts by saying all the things that are bothering her/him, while their partner listens and encourages them to continue by saying, "what else?" Sometimes by delving deeper, the one who is complaining realizes that there's more to the complaints than what s/he originally thought. The one complaining may start out angry but often will soften, and become more aware of what is really bothering her/him, and what s/he needs. The listener's job is to listen, without comment, and to try not to take it personally. What you are hearing is an indication of how frustrated or angry your partner is right now. Keep in mind that it's not all about you, even if most of the anger is being directed at you. You can switch roles when the first person is done, or at a later time.

14. Take time out.

When a conflict is not going anywhere, it can help to take some time away from your partner. Couples usually make up rules about time out, such as don't leave the house, and having a set amount of time for the time out, like 30 minutes, before checking back in with each other about whether or not they can continue the discussion. In cars, time out can just mean that no one talks for a set amount of time. Either partner can call time out, and it should mean immediate silence for an agreed-upon time. It is always better to have the amount of time set prior to an argument, or you will argue about that! Some couples don't set a specific amount of time, but remain silent for a while, and when they have calmed down enough to feel compassion, they check in with each other about their mutual readiness to continue the conversation or to let it go for now.

15. Listen carefully.

If your partner is trying to tell you something and you don't understand, listen carefully, ask clarifying questions, check out what you think they are saying, and keep trying to understand. Many arguments arise from our not really listening to each other, or assuming that we know what the other person is saying without checking it out first. It is always best to check that you understood the other person

correctly.

Of course, you won't be able to follow these guidelines one hundred percent of the time, and that's okay; no one can. But if you want your relationship to be based on respect, compassion, and clear communication, it's a good idea to try to follow these guidelines or others that work for you, as much as possible.

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Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Will He Remember You ... the Way You Want Him To?

By Susan Dunn

If you've ever had a long-distance relationship with a guy, and lose out to a new woman he finds in his hometown, even though you two had a phenomenal relationship, you might find some new research interesting, hopefully even consoling.

fMRI, functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, lets researchers watch human brains in action, providing new information about how we process emotions. And, yes, Virginia, men and women are different.

Before the fMRI, researchers couldn't observe the sequence of activity in various parts of the brain during a given mental activity. The standard MRI only gives a static detailed snapshot of the structure of the brain. The fMRI, however, gives a video, showing how the different structures interact, dynamically.

It could be you could maintain the LD relationship better because of how you store emotionally-charged memories.

Turhan Canli, Ph.D., a researcher at Stanford University, showed 100 photographs to 12 men and 12 women. Some were emotionally neutral things, like a fire hydrant. Others were emotionally disturbing, like a severed hand.

Three weeks later, he showed them the same images. The women were 15% more likely to remember the emotionally-charged pictures correctly. The fMRIs showed women store both the memory and the emotion linked with it in the same parts of the brain. Men, on the other hand, use the same brain regions, but they store the

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emotions and the memories in different areas within them.

Environmental factors also play a role, researchers added. Girls are taught to manage their feelings by bringing them up and expressing them, while boys are taught to stuff them down in 'manly' silence.

If you're heartbroken that he couldn't remember how good it was, now you know why. You aren't nuts. You remembered it right, but he remembered it differently.

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Can We Still Be Friends?

Feel Your Grief

Are You Relationship Ready?

Relationship-Making

How to keep up the SPICE in your Love Life.

Online Dating Secrets Revealed!

The First and Second Adam

How to Gain and Retain More Customers

How To Create HOT Information Products



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