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True Romance for Couples with Kids: 10 Inexpensive Ideas

By Susie Cortright

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Anyone can splurge on a formal dinner or a pricey bottle of perfume, but it takes creativity and forethought to be truly romantic.

The key lies in personalizing your celebration. Here are ten ideas to fuel your own creativity:

1. Empty a box of chocolates. Then cut out 50 to 100 hearts from lace doilies, construction paper, or fabric. On each cutout, record something about your mate that you love. Be specific, "The way you smell when you come to bed at night," "The way you take care of me when I'm sick," "Your recipe for pancakes"...

Fold the cutouts, place them in the chocolate box, and top with a red satin bow.

The time you spend coming up with these ideas will contribute to your own romantic mood, and what your partner thinks is a plain-old box of chocolates will instead be a treasured gift for years to come. Plus, you can add to the box for future birthday, holiday, or Valentine's Day celebrations.

2. Build a romantic fire. Before the kids go to bed, have fun roasting marshmallows. After their lights are out, host your own indoor picnic, complete with a bottle of wine and chocolate-covered strawberries.

3. Recreate your first date together. What were you wearing? Where did you go? Do you remember what you talked about? Spend the evening reminiscing and reflecting on how far you've come as a couple.

4. Spoon all night.

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5. Choose a book in which you are both interested, fiction or nonfiction. Read a new chapter each night before bed. This cozy tradition will allow you to spend some quality time together and often makes for thought-provoking breakfast conversations.
6. Make a tape of the songs special to your relationship. Include "your song," songs from your wedding, songs from favorite movies. Add a personal voice dedication and leave it in your partner's briefcase, Walkman, or car stereo.
7. Turn off the TV.
8. Kidnap your spouse. Arrange for a babysitter for a few hours—or a few days. A friend of mine had a lot of success with this one. She knew her husband had always wanted to get married in Vegas, but he had agreed to a large, formal ceremony hosted by her family. So, after they had been married 10 years, she surprised him at work with a packed suitcase. They caught an evening flight and renewed their vows before an Elvis impersonator in a Vegas chapel. Years later, they're still talking about it.
9. This one requires a babysitter, too. Next time you're visiting your parents or in-laws, leave the kids with the grandparents and travel to another town, where no one will recognize you. Check into a hotel or B&B. Dress like another person. Act like another person. It's fun to slip into another persona from time to time.
10. Have a scavenger hunt. Write a few poems, wrap candy kisses inside, and hide them around the house. Each poem should be a clue to finding the next one. Make sure the final clue lands your mate someplace you want to end up for the entire evening. A romance package, including a bottle of champagne and new lingerie, is a nice touch.

Create some romantic memories today. Now with your pocketbook, but with your imagination.

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Susie Michelle Cortright is the author of *Rekindling Your Romance after Kids* and *More Energy for Moms*. She is also the founder of the award-winning Momscape.com, a website designed to help busy parents find balance. Visit

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Days to Less Stress."

ROMANCE 101How to turn Your Relationship into a Great Romance!

By Gina Woods

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OK...Let's talk about romance! The #1 most important thing you need to turn your relationship into a great romance is **DESIRE**. You have to **WANT** great romance in your life. Well, who wouldn't want that? But it won't just happen...it will take some effort. But it will be well worth it!

When asking couples why they think the romance has escaped their relationships, the most common excuse is **TIME**. It's soooooo hard to find time and energy to devote to your relationships. But think for a moment back to your courtship. What was different then? Didn't you have a job then? Didn't you have other responsibilities then? Of course you did...maybe not to the extent that you do now, but you still had a schedule to keep, whether it was attending college, studying, playing sports, attending club meetings, keeping a job, etc. But somehow you found the time to "woo" your partner, right? You found time to date, right? Why? Because you **WANTED TO!** You planned it into your schedule and did it! And why were those times together so special? Because that specific amount of time was set aside and reserved for one reason...**ROMANCE!** And during those "dates" you gave 100% of your attention to each other, right? That's what made it special.

Now I want you to think about the last time you and your partner went out to dinner. What did you talk about? Maybe it was the family finances, or difficulties at work, or...the **KIDS**. Wow, what a romantic dinner, huh? That's the problem. You have to learn to create romantic situations that focus 100% on each other. Save the "problem solving" for another time. I can't tell you how many times in the past my husband and I went out to dinner and whenever we got home, I didn't even feel like we went out! Why? Because the whole time we were out, we were busy doing that "problem solving" stuff instead of enjoying what little time we had together. So, that's the second most important thing you need to turn your relationship into a great romance...**PRIORITY**. Make it a priority to spend quality, **FOCUSED** time with your partner. These special times should be set aside **JUST** for the two of you to enjoy each others company...nothing else...**PERIOD**.

Okay...So now we have established that creating great romance will require **DESIRE**, and making it a **PRIORITY**. The next thing we need is a **PLAN!** You may have heard the saying,

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"You didn't plan to fail, you just failed to plan!" Anything worth doing requires a good plan. It can be as simple as scheduling one evening per week as "date night," or promising to spend "x" amount of time doing something romantic for your partner each week. There are plenty of books, magazines, web sites, newsletters, etc. that will give you lots of ideas to use for your romantic "dates." Use your imagination & be creative! The most important thing is to make a plan and then stick to it...no matter what.

After that, all that's left to do is sit back and watch the magic of romance do it's thing! Oh, I'm not saying that this is going to be easy...it WILL take a little work. But it will be FUN work!

Gina Woods is the publisher of "E-Romance Weekly," an on-line weekly newsletter offering exciting "romantic recipes" to rekindle the romance in any relationship. For more information, visit <http://www.spiritwithindesigns.com/E-Romance/subscribe.html>. Join our FREE E-Romance Weekly Yahoo Group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/eromanceweekly>.

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