



WHY *Date Night* MATTERS

In the early years of marriage, couples usually find it easy to schedule date nights. Once children come along and careers get more intense though, date night takes last place on the list of important things needing attention. Before long, couples find themselves going through the motions of marriage and stuck in a rut when it comes to romance, all the while looking for a cure.

Guess what? Date night could be the cure and here are reasons why. When life gets crazy, intentionally scheduling regular time to move away from all the distractions – children, jobs, other commitments – to focus on each other and **talk** about important topics helps you stay connected. This connectedness helps you feel less stressed in the midst of the chaos that is life.

Speaking of less stress, another benefit of regular date nights is **increasing intimacy and passion in your marriage**. In the early years of marriage, romantic moments tend to come easily for couples. Romance often fades, however, without intentional effort to stoke the flames of desire. Date night helps couples remember why they first fell in love, and it lays the foundation for reigniting passion.

Regular date nights also help to **build resilience** to carry your marriage relationship during the challenging times. Focusing on each other and nurturing your relationship helps you build a strong foundation for your marriage. As a result, when you encounter tough times, you have built up enough marital bandwidth

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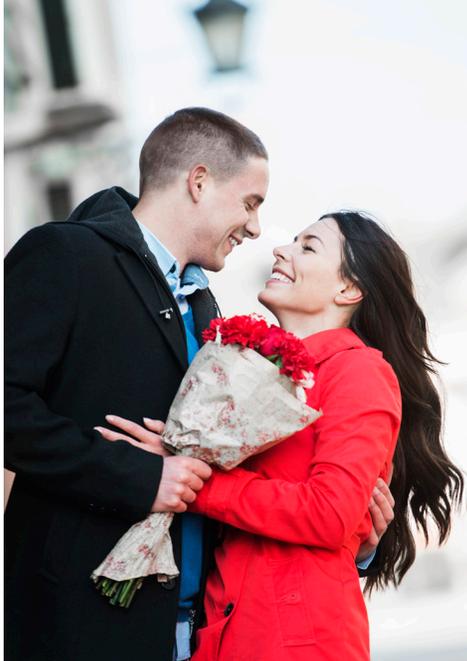
**COUNSELOR
COLUMN**
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Q: What things can my partner and I do to feel close again?

A: When trying to reconnect with your partner, there are many things you can try. The most important thing to remember is that it's imperative to make your relationship a priority, no matter how many other things are also taking up your time.

The first suggestion is to simply try to have more date nights or even date days (use PTO if you have to!). Spending more one-on-one time together will improve the bond you have and re-ignite

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that flame. Short on cash? Here are some budget-friendly ideas: www.daveramsey.com/blog/cheap-date-night-ideas.

Second, try taking time at least once every day to check in with each other about how each of you are doing, making sure to really listen and hear what your partner has to say. Checking in with each other can help sustain the bond you already share.

Other suggestions that you could incorporate into your daily routine include:

1. Hug for 20 seconds. Hugs that last 20 seconds increase levels of oxytocin (the love hormone), reduce blood pressure and cortisol (the stress hormone), increase happiness, lower stress, and improve your relationship and connection.

2. Complete a 6-second kiss. This increases bonding hormones such as oxytocin and dopamine, as well as epinephrine and norepinephrine which increase your heartbeat and send oxygenated blood to your brain.

3. Go to bed at the same time as your partner (at least a few nights per week). This can increase relationship satisfaction.

after your workout is done. The same principle applies here. It doesn't have to be extravagant, just different than what you usually do.

Date night may seem like an optional item on your "to-do" list that requires planning and energy you don't feel like you have right now. The truth is, date night is vital for the health of your relationship. If money is keeping you from going on a date, barter childcare with a friend for whom you can return the favor, collect all the loose change in your house and car and challenge yourselves to go on a date using that loose change.

Not feeling very creative? Here are a few ideas to get your juices flowing:

- Put the kids to bed early, pull out the candles, cook something easy or order carry out and have dinner by candlelight sans children.
- If your spouse can handle surprises, leave clues for a mystery date to their favorite

Feeling motivated and want more ideas? Learning what each other's love languages are can be very helpful. "The 5 Love Languages" is a great resource for building a stronger connection with your partner to ensure you are showing love the way they feel it most (quality time, physical touch, gifts, words of affirmation or acts of service). There is a book, website (www.5lovelanguages.com), and even an app that you can download to take the quiz and use the information to connect with your partner.

The Gottman Institute is another great resource to check out, too. It's a research-based approach to relationships. Its website (www.gottman.com) has couple's workshops, access to couple's counselors, blogs, an email newsletter, tools and services, and a ton of other information and resources that can help with improving your relationship!

If it continues to be difficult or seems impossible to get close to your partner again, especially after trying the suggestions listed above, consider attending couples (or individual) counseling to ensure there is no fear of emotional intimacy or other relationship problems that might be getting in the way.

restaurant or a location that has significant meaning to the two of you.

- Pull out the board games, order pizza and play on.
- Hop in the car, decide what direction you will head and how many miles you will drive. Grab a bite to eat at the restaurant closest to that mile marker and enjoy each other's company.

Date night doesn't have to be extravagant to make a significant positive impact on your marriage. Don't let the tyranny of the urgent crowd out nurturing your relationship. It's well worth the investment.

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to face difficulties as a team. When you come out on the other side of the challenge, your couple bond is strong instead of feeling frayed.

There is plenty of research about the significance of **play and fun moments in a marriage**. Howard Markman, a psychologist with the University of Denver's Center for Marital and Family Studies, says their research indicates the more you invest in fun and friendship and being there for your partner, the happier the relationship will get over time. The correlation between fun and marital happiness is high and significant. For men, the connection is even more important. Research showed men are more likely than women to call their spouse their best friend. So go ahead and make plans to play. It's vital for your marriage.

Most couples who have been married an extended period of time will probably tell you it's easy to fall in a rut. One day you look at each other and ask how you got to this place, especially when you vowed that you would never be that boring couple who barely has the energy to crawl to bed, much less plan a date night. Believe it or not, the routine and mundane can be the quiet killer of relationships. If this is you, it's not too late to do something different.

Shake things up a bit. It's kind of like working out. There are plenty of times you don't feel like exercising, but you are so glad you pushed yourself