



# RELATIONSHIP RENOVATION

## WAYS TO MAKE A GOOD THING GREAT

It's the little things that will take your love to the next level, our experts tell Karlie Jeffrey

When it comes to coupling up, most of us know what not to do. But the rules of romance shouldn't always be about the don'ts. "Love does require effort and work. You need to add fuel to that fire, but often it doesn't take much," explains psychologist and relationship counsellor Jacqueline Saad. And you'll be surprised by just how easy the dos are ...

### WRITE A LETTER

Letter writing is a dying art, but a pen and paper can work wonders for romance. "I encourage all clients to write love letters," says Saad. "It helps the writer really reflect on positive feelings and work out exactly why they're in the relationship." And research shows that when people write about their partnership for three consecutive days, they are more likely to be together three months later.<sup>3</sup> But don't be tempted to send texts or emails instead – they don't have the same effect. ▶

## GO TO BED AT THE SAME TIME

Remember at the start of your relationship, when you couldn't wait to climb into bed with your partner? While some things might change – including how often you have sex – spending time in your private space shouldn't. "Going to bed at the same time provides couples with a chance to reconnect and renew emotional intimacy," points out Saad. Ban reading, laptops and TV in the bedroom, and make it a retreat for your relationship. And don't just crash out; go to bed a little earlier and spend the time chatting, cuddling or more.

## SAY THANK YOU

A thank you a day will keep the divorce lawyers away, or so says the research. A 2010 study of cohabiting couples conducted in the US found that on days when a partner expressed more gratitude, the other felt more satisfied.\* "Expressing gratitude shows your partner you don't take them for granted," explains Saad. And remember, when it comes to being grateful, actions can speak much louder than words. "Don't just treat others the way you want

to be treated – do things for your partner that they'll enjoy, too," recommends sex therapist and relationship counsellor Desiree Spierings.

## BE PLAYFUL

"Laughing with your partner will bring you closer and remind you why you're together," comments Spierings. Couples should regularly do things together that are fun, different and aren't obligations (like your cousin's birthday barbecue). She also advises reminiscing: "Talk about your first date, wedding, honeymoon or the most amazing thing you've ever done for each other. It will remind you what's special about your relationship."

## IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

Forget the movies: another person shouldn't complete you, they should add to you, says Saad. "The healthiest relationships are ones where both partners can stand alone and don't expect every single need to be met by their partner." So get a little selfish and indulge in the things you like to do, but your partner doesn't. Go out for drinks with the girls. Sign up for that dance class. Your relationship will thank you for it. ■



## TIPS FOR EVERY STAGE

### HONEYMOONERS

#### POTENTIAL PITFALL:

Feeling you should be the picture-perfect partner and being too conscious of the other person's needs.

**SOLUTION:** Celebrate your flaws, suggests Saad. Go out for dinner with your partner and swap embarrassing stories. Talking about mistakes and making a joke of them will make you more comfortable to be yourself.

### NEW PARENTS

#### POTENTIAL PITFALL:

Focusing all your attention on the kids and forgetting about your partner's needs.

**SOLUTION:** It's time to schedule in a regular date night. "Get a babysitter and make sure you take that time out with your partner," says Saad. And don't feel guilty about it. "It's important that you show your kids what a healthy, affectionate relationship looks like."

### LONG-TERM LOVERS

#### POTENTIAL PITFALL:

Intimacy goes out the window and sex can become routine and stale.

**SOLUTION:** "Change the routine," advises Saad. Simply having sex at a different time of day shows you don't take the security of the relationship for granted. Also, communicate with your partner about your favourite moves, or new things you'd like to try.



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