



Helping Couples Connect

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Introduction

Whether you and your partner have been together for one year or decades, there will be times when you take each other for granted. It's easy to forget what drew you together in the first place amid the immediate demands of children, jobs, finances and household responsibilities. Everyday life can push your relationship to the bottom of the list.

But a strong and loving partnership is the foundation on which everything else stands. Challenges are easier to tackle as a team. And life's joys are sweeter when shared with your life partner.

Like anything else important to you, relationships need to be nurtured to thrive. This handbook is full of fun ideas for reconnecting with your partner on every level.



1. Reconnect Simply

When is the last time you and your partner worked out together? Or enjoyed learning about each other's hobbies? How long has it been since you cuddled on the couch? Or had a long, satisfying conversation?

It's common for couples to get stuck in the same pattern of relating. And it takes a conscious effort to break free of it. But it's well worth the reward. Try these ideas and exercises to help you and your partner connect in different ways.

An easy place to begin is with simple, everyday changes.

- Sit next to each other at restaurants.
- Do errands together.
- Go to bed at the same time.
- Cook together. It will promote teamwork. And conversation flows more naturally when you're working side by side.
- Do a chore that your spouse usually does.
- Ask each other questions. You may think you know everything about each other. But people grow and change over time.

36 Questions that Create Closeness

Researchers found that individuals who ask one another a series of increasingly personal questions become closer through the process. Ask each other all or some of the following questions that were used in the study. Try to set aside at least three uninterrupted times to connect for this activity!

Set I

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

Set II

1. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
2. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
3. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
4. What do you value most in a friendship?
5. What is your most treasured memory?
6. What is your most terrible memory?
7. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
8. What does friendship mean to you?
9. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
10. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
11. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
12. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

Set III

1. Make three true "we" statements each. For instance, "We are both in this room feeling ..."
2. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share ..."
3. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
4. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
5. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
6. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
7. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
8. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
9. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
10. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
11. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
12. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

Source: The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings, Arthur Aron, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Edward Melinat, California Graduate School of Family Psychology, Elaine N. Aron, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Robert Darrin Vallone, University of California, Santa Cruz, Renee J. Bator, Arizona State University from the SAGE

2. Find Deeper Meaning Together

Connecting on a spiritual level with your partner lifts both of you while grounding your relationship on a solid platform. Spirituality doesn't have to be tied to religion. It's the sense of being connected to something larger than yourself. It's the knowledge that your life has purpose and meaning. Feeding your spiritual needs as a couple heightens its impact.

- Spend time in nature, even if that's just sitting on your front stoop. Reflect silently on what you see. A caterpillar making its way up your steps, an ant carrying a crumb home to share. Be fully in the moment. Together.
- Attend worship services together, if you don't already.
- Pick a charity or cause and volunteer regularly together. Volunteering is shown to increase happiness and empathy among other things. Volunteering as a couple allows you to reap those benefits together while sharing a common experience.

Find Volunteer Opportunities

Take time as a couple to think about what you enjoy most. If you both love the outdoors, connect with a land conservation organization. If you share a concern for homelessness, connect with a shelter or soup kitchen. Explore needs for volunteers at local nursing homes, schools and pet shelters, too!

Here are some online resources for finding volunteer opportunities:

- [American Red Cross](#)
- [Citizen Corps Council](#)
- [Community Emergency Response Teams](#)
- [Corporation for National & Community Service](#)
- [Easter Seals Society](#)
- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [United Way](#)
- [VolunteerMatch](#)
- [Volunteer.gov](#)



3. Let Your Minds Meet

Remember those early days of staying up into the night talking? Of learning about each other's thoughts and opinions and sharing your own? Those types of conversations are exciting. They create intimacy between couples.

If your discussions these days revolve around the kids and finances, you're missing out on the joy of connecting intellectually with your partner. Here are ways to break out of your routine and rekindle your brain cells.

- Take a class together.
- Form a two-person book club. Take turns reading the same book, then discuss it over dinner.
- Read out loud to one another.
- Go to museums.
- Go to lectures.
- Go to a play.
- Teach each other something the other doesn't know: how to make your grandmother's spaghetti and meatballs, how to tie a fly, how to play the guitar.
- Do a project together that's new to both of you, so you're both learning together.

How to Talk About a Movie or Show

What happens when you leave the movie theater? Or when you finish binge-watching a multi-season series? Do you and your partner rehash the best parts? Pick apart the characters? If not, you're missing out. Sharing your thoughts about a movie or show enriches its entertainment value. It also opens up a new avenue of connection for you and your partner.

Enrich your entertainment experiences by learning about the actors and the story. Was it based on actual events? If so, research those. If based on a book, read that as a couple and compare it with the movie.

Discussion starters

Sometimes it's hard to know where to begin when you want to talk about a movie or show. Ask each other a few questions and go on from there:

1. Did you like it?
2. Who was your favorite character?
3. Who was your least favorite character?
4. What line stands out most for you?
5. Did you like the ending?
6. Would you have written/directed/produced it differently?

4. Have Fun Together

Who has time for fun when there are other more important things to tend to? Well, having fun together affects how happy you feel with your partner. Sharing new and exciting activities together leads to better relationships.

How to have fun

- Focus on the fun. Agree ahead of time to stay in the moment, even if other things are weighing on you.
- Get on the same team if either of you are very competitive. It's more fun to work together than to try to win against each other.
- Socialize with other couples and friends.
- Make time for fun. Pressing demands have a way of creeping in, so schedule play time in your calendar.

Make your own fun

You don't need money to have fun! Be spontaneous.

- Call out "5 things!" and a topic. The other person has to quickly list five things that fall under that topic. These can be from the everyday (5 things you see on the beach) to the romantic (5 things you love about me).
- Race to see how fast you can set the table for dinner—and clear it afterward. Try to break each other's records.
- Pull out a deck of cards or board game and play, just the two of you!

Go with the tried and true

You probably had loads of fun when you first met. Think back on how you spent your time together. Make time for those activities you used to enjoy together. They may include:

- Music festivals: Make a day or weekend of it.
- Weekend camping trips
- An amusement park or carnival: Sure, bring the kids but go on some rides together, if possible.

Try new things

- Make the decision to learn about each other's interests, then do them together. You may surprise yourselves by becoming a fan of professional hockey, watercolor painting or rock climbing!
- Make a bucket list together of adventures you haven't gotten around to yet. Then start tackling the list.

Our Bucket List

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
10.
11.
12.

5. Connect Romantically

Do you remember that feeling of first falling in love? Here are some ways to recapture—and hold onto—that emotion.

- Recreate your first date or revisit places from early in your relationship.
- Be physically affectionate with each other: hug, cuddle, hold hands.
- Make a music playlist of songs that have been meaningful to you over the years.
- Re-watch a movie that you enjoyed together back in the day.
- Read your wedding vows out loud to one another.
- Listen to music together.
- Put your phones away when you're together.
- Make a Greatest Hits list of your years together.

Update your wedding vows

Who says you can't amend your wedding vows? Make a date to pull out the originals and propose changes to reflect your lives now. This is an opportunity to reflect on your years together. What storms have you weathered? What joys have you celebrated? Think about all of the ways that you have been there for one another.

Write out your hopes for your future. Make them general, specific, or both. "I will continue to be your partner as we raise our children to be caring and contributing adults." "I will always put your well-being and that of our family before all else."

Incorporate humor. "I promise never to put off household repairs." "I vow to save the last slice of pizza for you."

Our Greatest Hits

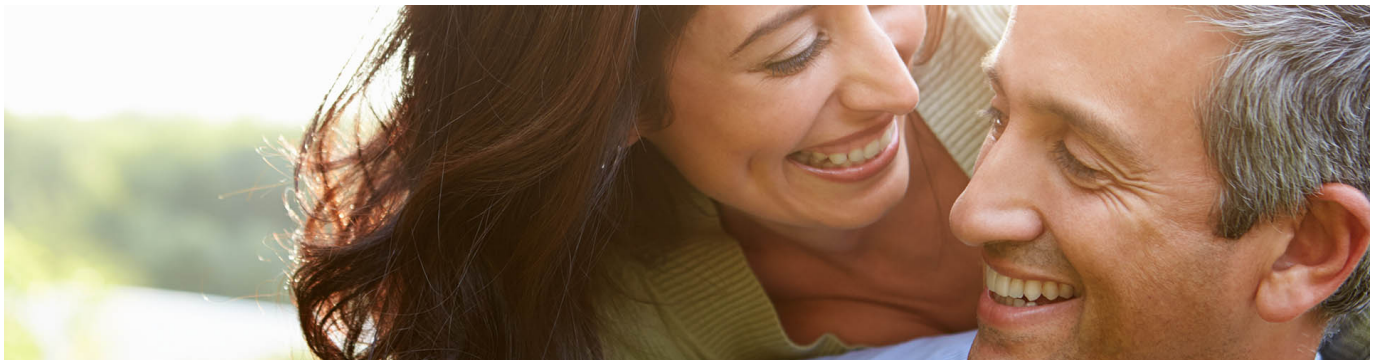
Travel back over your lives together and list all of those big and little things that you shared.

How we met

What we felt about each other at the time

Where we went on our first date

What we each wore on our first date
How we each knew we were in love
How we each knew our partner was in love with us
Our favorite music that we listened to, then and now
Our favorite place to spend time
Our best memories of our lives together



6. Be Active Together

Physical activity makes people feel better. Exercise increases feel-good” chemicals in the brain. Working out with your partner also strengthens your emotional bond. In fact, research shows that couples say they feel more in love with their partner after an exciting physical challenge or activity.

- If possible, get in the habit of taking a walk or bike ride around the block each evening. If there's no time for that, set aside an hour on weekends.
- Work out together. Do it casually, at your own pace. Or set fitness goals and work toward them together. Use fitness apps or schedule fitness dates each week.
- Get your adrenalin up with thrilling activities like ziplining, skydiving or bungee jumping.
- Try physical challenges like rock climbing, mountain biking, etc.
- Take ballroom dance lessons. Learning the steps together is a great way to reconnect as a couple.

Keep a calendar on the fridge, your phone, or below to schedule regular and special workouts together:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

7. Use Your Resources

Sometimes couples need outside support to work through difficulties. Whether you sign up for a couples retreat, talk to someone in your place of worship, or work with a couples counselor, agreeing to get help can set you on the path to a healed and stronger relationship.

Looking for lighter support? Check out the [Love Every Day app](#). This app is a fun and interactive way that helps you develop and practice good relationship communication in only a few minutes each day. You each get personalized text messages for 21 days to help foster a renewed sense of connection. By making intimate communication a consistent part of your daily routine, you and your partner learn to apply the skills in everyday life.

Taking the time to connect and grow is of great value to your relationship. Keep up the good work!



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