

50 ways to love your lover: Rekindling the spark

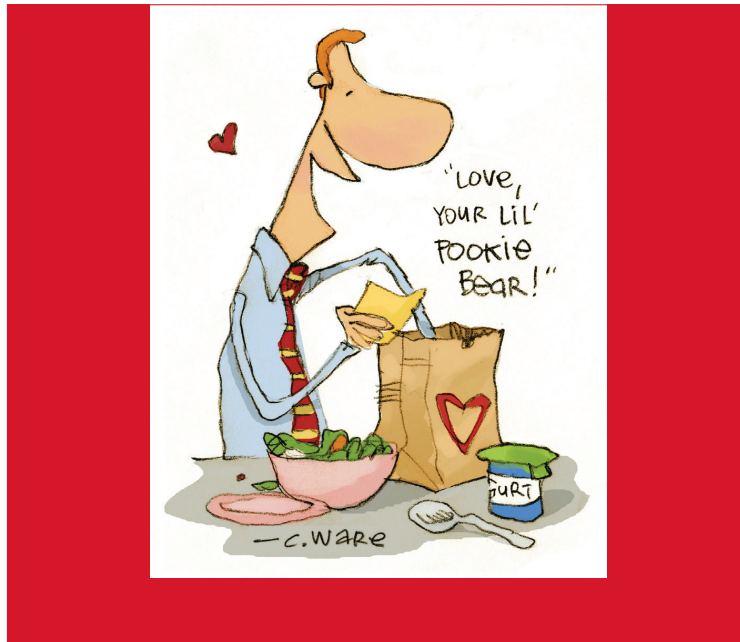
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In my last column I asked you to rate 50 aspects of your relationship, yet intentionally never defined just what constitutes a good score – as that is something only you can define. I hope you shared your responses with your partner, and were both able to openly discuss where you scored high and in what areas you could improve.

I also intentionally used the word “I” and not “my partner” in the questions, to reflect the importance of our looking inward, to work on changing or bettering ourselves – rather than looking for our partners to “do something” or to change. What you do to make your partner feel good, and how you are there for them when it matters, your respect and caring, will be reflected in the rating of your relationship.

So in the spirit of the “50 shades of intimacy” questionnaire, I present you with 50 ways to rekindle your love and maintain intimacy long after the honeymoon. Some of these appeared in my book *Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships, Resolving Conflicts*; others are new additions for the couple of 2015. All are things I discuss with just about every couple that comes into my office.

1. Communication and intimacy fuel a healthy relationship.
2. Relationships take time, energy, attention and commitment.
3. Evaluate how you spend your time, and determine what's really important.
4. Nurture your relationship to enable it to grow. Never take it for granted.
5. How you choose to see a situation helps determine your ability to find a solution.
6. Preconceived ideas can negatively influence your relationship. If your expectations don't match your reality, work to change your focus and perceptions.
7. Create emotional and physical closeness through caring gestures – an unexpected call, message or special treat.
8. Your nervous system is genetically programmed to benefit from face-to-face contact. Put down your technological devices, look into your partner's eyes, be present and recognize your real “friend.”
9. Human beings thrive on touch. Reach out to your partner. Hold hands, hug, kiss.
10. Appreciate your partner's strengths. Say thank-you for the small things.
11. Note the message your posture, body language, tone and ability to listen convey about how you view your relationship.
12. Both partners need to assume responsibility for maintaining intimacy.



SMALL GESTURES of love can go a long way in making your partner feel special. (TNS)

13. Recognize that men and women often think and respond very differently. Don't judge but rather try to understand. For example, many women need to know that their world is in order to focus on intimacy. Men compartmentalize and zone out the world. Women need to be feel connected emotionally to appreciate the physical – and need to feel loved in order to have sex. Men often need to have sex in order to feel loved, and see it as a way to reduce stress and tension.
14. Treat your partner with the same respect that you would like to receive.
15. Put yourself in your partner's shoes and if they don't fit, ask yourself why. Maybe their bad day has nothing to do with you. Be patient and empathetic.
16. Choose your words carefully. Once said, they can never be taken back.
17. Be deliberate and reflective in your listening, not defensive or reactive. Take a step back, evaluate the situation, work on being calm, free from anger, and remember your goal is to enhance connectedness.
18. Ask your partner how you can be helpful; let your partner know what you need.
19. You can't change others, but you can make small changes in yourself to be a better person. The effect on your partner may be surprising.
20. You can say just about anything to anyone. How you choose to say it will

- determine how it gets heard. Ask yourself if what you are about to say will be helpful. If not, don't say it.
21. All couples disagree. The goal isn't to be right, but to find the “right way” to resolve issues.
22. Honor yourself through your behavior, speech and actions. Make your partner feel good.
23. Choose your battles carefully. Put things in perspective, create goodwill and practice forgiveness. Work to recreate warmth.
24. Learn how to fight fairly so there are no long-term scars. Be open and honest, and remember – this is a partnership.
25. Don't blame or ascribe guilt.
26. While many problems have no solutions, it is nonetheless important to discuss and resolve the issues you can.
27. Let your partner know how much they are loved, valued and appreciated. We all want to feel safe and secure, and know that our partners are there for us and will be there when it matters.
28. You have two ears and one mouth – make sure you listen twice as much as you speak. Ask your partner how you could be a better listener, and listen to the answer!
29. Put everything in perspective. Learn how to let go, forgive wholeheartedly and move on.
30. Look after your partner by being a good friend and a giver.
31. Search for the positive. “Catch” your

- partner “doing good,” and tell them.
32. Everyone appreciates a compliment. Make sure your compliment-to-criticism ratio exceeds 5:1.
33. Give the gift of your time to the relationship. Connect with each other during the day with a quick call, and at night with “teatime.”
34. Go on dates – just the two of you – without the kids or friends, not to a movie but to talk. Set up a weekly date night where you can just be there for each other, free of distractions.
35. You each bear responsibility for creating meaning within the relationship.
36. You create your own happiness. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Don't make assumptions.
37. Say what you need to say, and love each other with all that you have to give.
38. Live in the present, seeing each day as your last and each moment as precious, to enjoy your relationship to the fullest.
39. Remember that you're players on the same team. Work together for a common goal, so you both can win.
40. Accept responsibility and be aware of the role your contribution and actions play. Small changes in your behavior can shift the inertia of the relationship.
41. Make your partner feel good. Don't nag, blame or shame. Share responsibility and create solutions together.
42. Give your partner non-material gifts every day. Caring, compassion, goodwill and a genuine “how are you” go a long way.
43. We are often the most impatient with those we care most about. Don't be!
44. Nurture and take care of each other in a safe and loving environment.
45. Never go to sleep angry.
46. Talk about how to enhance your sex life. Work at improving intimacy. Don't be afraid to get help if needed.
47. Create intimate moments and heart-to-heart talks, through shared interests and common goals.
48. Nurture your relationship and rekindle your love. It is essential to like each other, laugh and have fun with one another, and enjoy being together. If that isn't happening, seek help.
49. Be spontaneous, creative and impulsive. Passion and excitement beat boredom and routine.
50. Share your thoughts, feelings, goals and dreams about the future together. ■

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