

**BRING YOUR MARRIAGE
BACK TO
NEWLYWEDS AGAIN**

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INTRODUCTION

Remember back to your wedding day. I'm not talking about just the ceremony and reception. I want you to remember how you felt. Think back to looking into the eyes of your intended spouse and how happy you were. Your marriage was going to last forever. You were sure of that much.

Because this man or woman made you feel so special. Maybe your new husband was the most romantic guy you had ever met. Maybe your new wife was one of the most incredible people you had ever met. Both of you knew that this was a marriage that would work. Your life would always be as magical as it was in the very beginning.

You spent the first few months of your life settling in as a married couple. Perhaps you couldn't keep your hands off of each other and made those around you roll their eyes as they watched your PDA with envy. But you didn't care – you were in love!

And then, reality sets in. You start to notice little things about your true love that drive you crazy. You think you can deal with it, and maybe you can for awhile. But then, you start to pull away just a little bit. You still love him or her, but it's just not the same.

You start to take each other for granted. After all, you're married – that's part of married life, isn't it? Then you wake up one morning and look over at your love. You wonder what happened to that fire – that amazing desire that couldn't be controlled. Why don't you feel like you did on your honeymoon?

Romance dies, that's a fact, right? When you find the love of your life, you'll both settle into a daily routine of

financial, household, and child-rearing responsibilities, forgetting you are a couple, right? Romance will only last through the initial crush of the relationship. After that you and your partner will start taking each other for granted, right?

It does not have to be this way. There are many relationships where romance is alive and well. Open up your local paper and look for the anniversary announcements. It can actually be very motivating to see those couples who are celebrating their 25th, 30th, even 50th wedding anniversaries.

In case you think this is a trivial subject, please know romance matters to the health and well being of your relationship. Being romantic is nothing more or less than appreciating and celebrating your partner.

This means if romance dies, one or both people in the relationship will begin to feel unappreciated. For many, this can be the beginning of the end of the relationship, or perhaps the beginning of an affair.

Is it just a part of life? Do you let that fire die into just a smoldering pile of ashes? You don't have to! In fact, there is no reason at all why you can't get back what you had when you were newlyweds. It just takes a little effort.

There are millions of married couples out there who know what it takes to stay in love and keep their marriage fresh and new. Want to know their secrets? No problem!

Keeping romance alive and well in your marriage can be achieved, but it does take work. Anything in life that is truly good and satisfying takes work. However, the rewards are HUGE, so it's well worth the effort! We're here to show you how to "Bring Your Marriage Back to Newlyweds Again!"

WHY DO MARRIAGES FAIL?

No one gets married expecting to get divorced. Why bother in the first place? We are filled with hope when we say "I Do" to that other person. But the cold reality is that, the divorce rate in America is ridiculously high and is rising every day.

There was once a time when people got married and it stuck. In fact, many times, these people got married after knowing each other for only a short time. They didn't live together first. They never got intimate just to "test the waters". They dove in head first and were determined to make it last.

But then times changed. What brought it about? Speculation abounds when it comes to this question. Many people think it was the women's rights movement in the 70's.

Others believe that it came about with the advent of more media outlets and the portrayal of sexier, promiscuous characters. Still others say it's because people just aren't as committed as they once were because of the instant gratification that we expect even to this day.

Whatever the reason, the divorce rate has raised alarmingly over the past few decades. Roughly HALF of all people who get married will get divorced within 10 years of saying their vows. From 1970 to 1996 the divorce rate quadrupled according to the United States Census report.

Many people think they have to watch out for the infamous seven-year itch that comes about after seven years of marriage. Today, couples need to watch out for the two-year itch. Dissatisfaction in marriages happens earlier and earlier as people become more disillusioned with their

dreams when they don't become reality as quickly as they think it should.

In the past, a divorce was difficult to obtain. Only under extreme circumstances such as abuse or adultery were you granted a divorce. Then the courts started allowing irreconcilable differences as a reason to divorce and then the no-fault divorce came along. This meant all you had to do was live apart from your spouse for 6 months and then you could get a divorce without anyone taking on the blame.

Now, a divorce is easier to get than a driver's license. You can even download divorce papers on the internet these days. Fill them out, get signatures, and file with the court. Poof, you're no longer married. Sometimes this can be accomplished in the same day.

Think it's a travesty? Maybe it is. But it's reality. So why do marriages fail?

While the answers to that question are many, there is a growing body of research to suggest there are four negative risk factors that create barriers to oneness in marriage and increase a couple's chances for marital failure.

First, negative behavior patterns can have a hugely negative impact on a marriage. This occurs when partners respond negatively to each other continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile.

When a conversation escalates into an argument, this creates tension that can eat away at a marriage. Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight.

Escalation can develop in two different ways. The first is a major shouting fight that may erupt over a conflict as small as putting the cap back on the toothpaste. As the battle heats up the partners get more and more angry, saying mean things about each other.

Frequently there are threats to end the relationship. Over time those angry words damage oneness, and angry threats to leave begin to seem like prophecy. Once negative comments are made, they are hard to take back and drive a knife into the partner's heart.

These reckless words can do great damage to a marriage because when an argument escalates, every comment and vulnerability becomes fair game. Concerns, failings, and past mistakes can now be used by the attacking partner. Oneness and intimacy can be shattered quickly by a few reckless words.

You may be thinking, "We don't fight like cats and dogs." And while that may be true, your marriage may still have this risk factor. Damaging escalation is not always dramatic. Voices do not have to be raised for couples to get into a cycle of returning negative for negative.

Conflict over paying the rent, taking out the garbage, running errands that result in muttering to oneself, rolling your eyes, or throwing up your hands can also be examples of escalation.

The next negative factor that contributes to the erosion of marriage is invalidation. Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.

Invalidation can take many forms. Sometimes it can be caustic, in which one partner (or both) attacks the other person verbally. You can hear, and even feel, the contempt one partner has for another.

Sarcastic phrases like "Well, I'm sorry I'm not perfect like you" or "I forgot how lucky I am to be married to you" can cut like a knife. These are attacks on the person's character and personality that easily destroy a marriage. Research has found that invalidation is one of the best predictors of future problems and divorce.

Invalidation can also be much more subtle. It may involve an argument where contempt for the other partner is not so obvious. One partner may merely be putting the other partner down for his or her feelings.

The message conveyed is that your feelings do not matter. A husband may put his wife down because she is more emotional or because she is more easily hurt by comments. A husband may invalidate a wife's fears about the children's safety. A wife may invalidate a husband's desire to succeed in the company, saying that it really doesn't matter if he becomes district manager.

Ultimately the partner receiving these comments begins to share less and less so that the intimate level of sharing evaporates. When this happens, oneness is lost.

Sometimes invalidation may be nothing more than trite clichés like "It's not so bad". While the sayings may be true, they invalidate the pain or concern of the other partner. They make the other partner feel like their fears or frustrations are inappropriate.

Negative interpretations are the third risk factor toward a failing marriage. Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case.

Such behavior can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erode intimacy and oneness in a

marriage. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents. As a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough vacation time. She, in turn, considers his behavior as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative interpretations mount and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralized.

Another kind of negative interpretation is mind reading. Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something. Nearly everyone is guilty of mind reading at some time or other. And when you mind read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for a marriage.

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed marriages there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner. That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

Finally, there is withdrawal and avoidance. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as 'turning off' or 'shutting down' during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a

partner's suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through

Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described.

In a typical marriage, one partner is the pursuer and the other is the withdrawer. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the husband is the one who withdraws.

Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally safe enough to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband withdraws, the wife feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage. In other words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most pursuers really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Each of these four risk factors (escalation, invalidation, negative interpretations, and withdrawal and avoidance) can build barriers in a marriage leading ultimately to loneliness and isolation.

The research shows that couples that want a good marriage need to eliminate these risk factors from their marriage, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the marriage. It is never too late to put your marriage back on track.

How can you tell if your marriage is in trouble? There are warning signs

IS YOUR MARRIAGE IN DANGER?

Marriages rarely die overnight. Almost always, the destruction of a marriage happens little by little, over time. Ideally, if trouble arises in your marriage, you and your spouse should be able to respond to problems before they cause serious damage to your relationship. You can then either work things out and remain married, or make a mutual decision to separate or get divorced.

However, if your marriage is in serious trouble, any discussion, cooperation, or compromise may be impossible, and you may have no option but to end it yourself, possibly against your spouse's wishes.

When you are having marriage problems, whether they are big or small, the sooner you face facts and decide what to do about them the better. Burying your head in the sand when it comes to marital woes won't make your problems go away. In fact, they'll probably just get worse.

You may find yourself replaying old arguments, resurrecting old hurts, crying a lot, or becoming consumed with anger when your marriage is in trouble. Those responses can quickly turn small problems into big ones and cause you to lose all perspective when it comes to your spouse and your marriage.

Furthermore, when you let your emotions get out of control, it becomes difficult if not impossible for you to identify and realistically assess all the options you have for dealing with your troubles.

To help bring some objectivity and common sense to your situation so that you can gain a true appreciation of just how bad (or not so bad) things really are, consider some of the more common signs of a marriage in crisis, such as infidelity and contempt.

When your marriage is going through tough times, you may find yourself wondering if it's an instance of the "for better or for worse" your marriage vows alluded to, or if your relationship is truly on the rocks.

Although no test exists that can tell you if your problems are typical reactions to the stress and strain most marriages experience at one time or another, or if they point to more-serious issues, troubled marriages do tend to exhibit many of the same characteristics.

How many of the following statements apply to your marriage?

- In your mind, your spouse just can't do anything right anymore.
- You fight constantly.
- You've lost the ability or the willingness to resolve your marital problems.
- Resentment and contempt have replaced patience and love.
- You've turned from lovers into roommates.
- One or both of you is having an affair.

- You go out of your way to avoid being together and, when you are together, you have nothing to talk about.
- Your children are reacting to the stress in your marriage by fighting more, having difficulty in school, getting into trouble with the police, abusing drugs or alcohol, or becoming sexually promiscuous.
- You have begun having thoughts about divorce.
- When you're not around your partner, you act more confident and in control

Don't panic if you find that your marriage exhibits some of these characteristics — you are not necessarily headed for divorce court. However, you do have cause for concern and it's time for you and your spouse, first separately and then together, to assess your options and decide what to do next.

Some couples choose to see a marriage counselor, and this can be an excellent way to figure out where exactly your marriage started to get into trouble. But you can regain the wonderfulness of your marriage yourself if you are committed to working toward that end result.

STARTING DOWN THE ROAD TOWARDS ROMANCE

Most experts agree that the best way to start back on the road to a blissful marriage is to rekindle the romance that you had early on in your relationship. Maybe you would get your wife flowers just because. Perhaps you would leave your husband little notes to show your love.

After awhile, those little gestures start to seem less important. You just stop doing those things for your partner

because you figure they know how much you love them. This is where most couples start to fall into an apathetic state of mind when it comes to their marriage.

Life as a married couple eventually becomes stale and routine with no passion anymore. You are still partners, but are no longer lovers like you once were.

The roots of marital disenchantment are usually exposed shortly after marriage, when reality intrudes on fantasy. This adjustment period reveals the other's imperfections.

Shortcomings, once viewed as minor and glossed over in the full bloom of love, suddenly take on ominous dimensions. Cute eccentricities grow into aggravating annoyances. Rudeness replaces romance.

Each spouse defends his or her own territory, and the one union reverts to two identities, as the fantasy of romantic oneness begins to fade. Requests become demands. Marital disharmony takes over and negative actions, left unchecked, can spell disaster for two well-intentioned former lovers.

Many couples love each other deeply, and genuinely enjoy each others' company, yet feel that the relationship is stale. They long for some of the old intensity, romance, and spontaneity.

Others don't see the need for that intensity, or even believe that it's possible to feel that again. They assume that intensity exists only at the beginning of a relationship, and that "mature love" is more settled and less exciting.

While how we feel toward each other certainly changes and evolves over the years, the truth is that our relationships reflect what we put into them.

Children can be so carefree and loving because they have lived for just a few years—a much shorter time in which to accumulate negative experiences and build up feelings of resentment, anger, and mistrust.

Relationships are similar to this. In the beginning, we don't know each other very well, and aren't carrying around resentments from past interactions with each other. As the years go by, these resentments accumulate. We no longer look at our partner with the same fresh, un-judging eyes.

So what do you do? Retreating into your own worlds will only serve to damage the marriage more. There are several things you can do to regain the romance, but it has to start within each of you. Both of you must be willing to give a little in order to get back that fire that was there before your wedding day and just afterwards.

Start by taking another look at your spouse. A good, hard look at who they are. Look at your partner with a fresh look, let go of past baggage, and remember all the reasons we love her/him so much. This means stretching past any resentments, and opening up to feeling and giving love more fully.

Start out by thinking about your partner and all the reasons that you fell in love with her/him in the first place. What attracted you to him or her initially? How did you feel when you were around each other? Early in your relationship when you were telling others about this great new person in your life, what did you tell them? Did he make you laugh? Did her smile light up a room?

When we take and look at our partner with the same eyes we had early on in the relationship, we can start seeing that those qualities that attracted you to them in the first place are really still there. They have just been overshadowed by all the other stuff that everyday life entails.

This about what that person means to you. Certainly it's more than just someone to be around. Sure, you love the security, but what about the companionship, the things you share, the past you have lived? Maybe there have been some rough patches, but there have been good times too. Remember them, wrap your mind around them, and focus on them. That is what will get you started toward bringing romance back to your marriage.

Once you do this, resolve to become self-directed in your quest towards a more passionate marriage. Mates must become responsible for their own actions, they say. Each mate should identify and recognize his or her inaccurate, exaggerated expectations.

Recognition precedes change. By recognizing exaggerated expectations, each mate creates room for maneuvering and motivation for change.

This, then, is self-direction: directing the attention to our own unrealistic expectations of the other. Each mate takes full responsibility for his or her thoughts and actions, whether they are realistic or selfishly imagined. Now change can begin to take place in a marriage.

The implications of this new approach are enormous. It takes two people to have a marriage, but only one to change it. We end up feeling helpless and out of control in our marriages simply because we can't control our partners.

The truth is that we need only learn to control ourselves. We ultimately come to feel alone in our marriages because we have replaced an accepting attitude toward our partner with unconscious expectations that are ultimately self-defeating.

The first rule of behavior and controlling our emotions is to accept the fact that we can't change others, we can

only change ourselves. Frustration comes from trying to manipulate those around us when we really should be concentrating on us and our own behaviors.

Being self-directed—taking personal responsibility for one's own actions—empowers both husband and wife. Rather than feeling victimized, each mate gains greater control over his or her life. A positive, constructive effect begins to transform the marriage. Counselors know that when one mate begins to change for the better, invariably the entire relationship improves.

Many couples are committed to marriage in spite of the self-centered, self-gratifying, self-oriented influences of the world around them. When a husband and wife, struggling to get their own way in marriage, begin to shift their frame of thinking from a demanding to a sustaining and supportive one, they can happily find themselves in a second honeymoon.

Specific steps must be taken to pave the way to a renewed and revitalized relationship. Marital happiness requires demythologizing marriage, fairly evaluating unrealistic expectations and replacing them with the healthy realities of a fulfilling relationship.

What positive steps can you take to rebuild your relationship, to put real romance and love in your marriage?

PAVING THE ROAD TO ROMANCE

There are a number of specific things that can be done to rekindle that romance. We'll address a lot of them later on in the book, but first you must lay down the foundation before you start down the road. Becoming self-directed in your quest for a better marriage is a great way to start. Now let's get a bit more in-depth.

First of all, you must face the facts. The notion that if your mate really loves you he or she will automatically change for you is usually an illusion. Here is where self-direction can help. Rather than demanding that your mate change for you, why not ask your mate what he or she would like you to change?

This can bring immediate positive benefits. As one partner begins to change, renewed respect follows, and an example is set for the other to follow. It's never easy to admit to personal faults and shortcomings, but, when we ask for them to be pointed out and take concrete steps to change them, the situation improves for both partners.

Be honest, and face the facts, even if you're uncomfortable taking these steps. Realize that you need to grow. When you do your marital relationship will also grow.

Understand what your partner needs. Another myth is that if your mate really loved you, he or she would always understand you. The story goes that an older couple sought marriage counseling, and the counselor asked the husband if he had ever told his wife of 35 years that he loved her. He responded: "Well, I don't think I need to do that over and over. After all, I told her I loved her when we got married."

This man, along with, perhaps, you and me, didn't realize that we all need reassurance now and then to allay our normal doubts and insecurities. Understanding of your mate requires certain sensitivity to his or her needs. The two sexes are, after all, quite different.

Instead of seeing your differences as hindrances toward a happy marriage, start seeing them as strengths. Well-meaning couples sometimes see differences as negotiable. But negotiation is too often motivated by a selfish want rather than by love or selflessness. No two human beings are exactly alike. On the surface we may appear similar in many ways. But beneath the surface many differences lie hidden.

Those differences become more pronounced under pressure. Rather than negotiating differences to fit one's selfish desires, try to view your mate's differences positively, as strengths.

Look around you. The earth's biological systems work independently and interdependently. The ecological systems are interdependent. Birds, insects, flowers and fruit trees all function independently within their species. Yet there is interdependence when the fertilization of flowers and trees often depends on both birds and insects in search of food.

In a similar way, a husband and wife can benefit from their differences, thus making two much stronger than one. Women are usually more intuitive, while men are more analytical. Rather than negotiate away such differences, try accepting your mate's strengths.

When key decisions are made for both husband and wife, the wife's intuition and the husband's analytical makeup can combine for a better decision. Combining strengths, rather than letting them be a potential source of conflict, can be a powerful factor in building a successful marriage.

Realize that anything good – like a good marriage - will require some effort and some work. Some mates assume that if they have to work on their marriage there must be something wrong with it.

Perhaps this assumption comes from a naively romantic outlook toward marriage shaped by popular entertainment and culture. Most who plan to marry assume their marriage is different and therefore impervious to marital problems so common to the rest of us. What every married couple soon finds out is that, although marriage is wonderful, it is also sometimes quite difficult.

Difficult is not always bad. The human experience is fraught with difficulties and, thus, we can empathize with

others in their hardships. As in life, so it is in marriage. Life in general and marriage specifically can be happy, but both can be filled with difficulties.

Good relationships don't just happen; they are cultivated. The good ones are sustained by good works. To bear the rich fruit of a happier marriage requires a personal investment of time, interest and diligence. One person put it this way: "The only relationship that doesn't require work is the one that's not worth having."

Some assume that having to work on marriage after saying "I do" is proof that the relationship wasn't good enough in the beginning. This notion demonstrates a lack of understanding.

The truth is that all marriages, and especially those we consider the happiest, are marriages that both partners have worked on. It's no accident that "for better or for worse" is part of many marriage ceremonies?

Work correctly implies sacrifice; work or sacrifice in marriage helps make romantic lovers into inseparable friends.

Don't just be lovers, be friends as well. In the most fruitful and productive marriages, mates share the relationship of friendship as well as romantic love.

Many psychological and emotional differences come into play in these relationships, of course. Friendship brings a significantly different array of experiences and feelings to a marriage from those brought by romance.

In terms of its effect, the friendship relationship within marriage can be the most significant because of the amount of time marriage partners spend together, especially as the marriage matures and grows. Still, romance in marriage should be rekindled. It will be by those who are working at having happier marriages.

You must change your state of mind if you want to realize success in bringing your marriage back to a newlywed state.

THINKING FOR A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

There are certain attitudes and actions that can help bring romance back to your marriage. Adopting these attitudes can help keep romance alive or revive it in ways you never thought possible.

When you get frustrated over your husband's laziness or sick to death of your wife's nagging, look at this list and put them to use. You might be quite surprised at what a change they can make!

First, Learn compassion and acceptance. Realize that your partner is human, no matter how perfect he or she seemed in the beginning. He is going to do things that bug you. She is going to do things to disappoint you. Expect this. In fact, is there any relationship of any type where this is not the case? Try to have as much compassion for and acceptance of your partner as you do for your friends.

Most importantly, remember your partner is not imperfect to hurt you. His or her imperfections are not an indication of lack of love for you.

Communicate, communicate, and communicate negative emotions. Communicate when you feel hurt. Communicate when you need something to change. Communicate when you are disappointed. Communicate when you feel angry. Communicate when you feel needy.

It is the negative emotions, like these that we tend to not want to communicate in a relationship. We think we are taking care of our partner by sparing him or her our anger or disappointment. In fact, when we hold our negative emotions back, we are quietly releasing poison into the atmosphere of the relationship.

The best thing to do with any negative emotion is to get it out in the open and resolve it. But, communicate these emotions instead of accusing your partner of making you feel this way or that.

Appreciate and celebrate your partner every day. I know this one is hard to do, but here is something that will help immediately. Live each day as if this is the last day you have with your partner.

I don't mean to be fatalistic, but accidents happen all of the time. For all you know, today could be the last day you and your partner have together. And if it is the last day, you won't know it until it is over.

The thing most people regret when a loved one dies is not having had the opportunity to say "I love you." If a loved one has died in your life, you know exactly what I mean.

Live each day as if it were the last day of your relationship. If this really was the last day with your partner, you would want him or her to know how much he or she is loved and appreciated.

Touch each other every day. Physical connection is essential to the health and longevity of the relationship, as well as to the health and longevity of each of you.

If you have been out of practice for a while, you may not feel romantic at first, may not want to be intimate with your partner. Even if it feels artificial, I suggest you try to connect physically and sexually. As you reconnect, you will

find it gets easier to continue reconnecting and to bring the romance and even love back into your relationship.

So how do you do this? There are lots of ways to get started. Let's start with the generalities.

LIVING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

The following suggestions should be implemented anytime you want to rekindle the romance that has gone away. They are simple but very powerful!

Make a list of the special days that you celebrate together, such as the day you met, a monthly or yearly anniversary date, or even the anniversary of a special date from your past. On these days make a point to spend some time quality time together. Cook a special meal. Buy a card, write a short letter and let your spouse know that you didn't forget.

Toast each other when you sit down to dinner. It doesn't need to be over bubbly or wine, but even a glass of water or iced tea. Tell your mate something you love about him or her and then drink to it!

Let your spontaneous side show through. Taking someone for granted can be the result of getting stuck in a bad routine. Break the routine by meeting up after work if that is something you don't normally do. Allow for more romance in your life.

Take pictures every day. Don't save the camera for holidays and special occasions. Create a visual scrapbook of your everyday lives together. Better still, set the timer and pose together. You will both appreciate the warmth of the moment when you see these snapshots in an album down the road.

Set something aside for your spouse every day. It might be a magazine article you read during your commute, a link to a website you came across, or even a story you heard at the office water cooler. They will appreciate that you took a moment to think of them during the course of your day.

Do something thoughtful every day. Maybe its making a cup of hot cocoa in the morning, sticking a surprise note in his brief case, or leaving a chocolate 'kiss' on the night stand before bedtime. Everyone loves a romantic surprise.

Be generous with your compliments. It's always easier to practice flattery at the start of a relationship, but also easier to forget to say later on. Remember that everyone loves a sincere compliment and your partner is no different.

Let him or her see you at your best. It's ironic that we dress up to meet total strangers but let ourselves go around our nearest and dearest. Most men love to see their woman in attractive colors, in well fitting clothes and perhaps wearing a hint of their favorite fragrance. Keeping a tidy appearance is simple but most important.

Be honest if you are feeling stressed or under the weather. Your spouse will appreciate your honesty and will know not to take it personally when you are in a bad mood.

Trust your partner's decisions. You may not agree with everything your partner does, but truly having trust in another person requires that you accept the decisions he makes.

You may not always agree with the way he handles a crisis situation for example. While it is your responsibility to talk about your concerns, it's also your responsibility to step back and not argue once a decision has been reached. And if the outcome doesn't play out as he anticipated, avoid saying "I told you so."

Get back in touch with each other. In the beginning, couples often touch each other: holding hands, stroking hair, hugging, putting their arms around each other. When romance falls away from a marriage, often the only times people touch is when they want sex. This can make your partner feel used and unloved.

Why does the touching disappear after marriage or once you have been intimate. During courtship, most couples refrain from intimate touching. It's proper to practice physical restraint in the early stages of a relationship. But once you are given the green light to touch in a sexual way, the impulse for affectionate touching may ebb. After the intense pleasure of sexual touch, a simple hug can pale by comparison.

But women need that non-sexual touch. As children, we like to be cuddled. Think of how good it feels when your partner snuggles up against you. Women never lose that strong need to be held. Men need to be tuned into this desire and start that touching again. She will respond in ways that you'll be happy with and when it comes time for the sexual touch, she'll be much more receptive!

Remember that compliments are free. When you are dating, chances are that the compliments were free-flowing. After you've been married awhile, the compliments start to go away.

Why? Maybe you stop noticing your partner's appearance. Perhaps you just don't take the time to really notice your partner. This can cause your spouse to feel hurt and rejected. It can even cause them to stop taking care of themselves and trying to be attractive for you. Even worse, it could cause them to try and look especially nice for other people. We all know what that can lead to!

As we grow older, our bodies change. It's inevitable. Just as our bodies change, our relationships change. It can be a huge help to your relationship if you reassure your partner that you still find them attractive and sexy. Don't assume that your partner knows this – tell them!

This is where communication is important. One woman who had been married for ten years simply came out and asked her husband, "If I ask you how I look, would you say that I look beautiful?" He asked if he should say that even if he didn't feel like it. She told him, "Yes, I would. It helps me feel better about myself." Her husband did this for awhile and they found their marriage improving dramatically from just a simple compliment.

Some women feel like their husbands should compliment them on their own, but sometimes men feel uncomfortable doing this. It's kind of humorous, that when dating, men are fine with complimenting their mate, but once married, those compliments seem to dry up. Don't let this happen in your marriage! Compliment your mate – even on the little things.

My husband is the worst about offering up compliments to me. I have learned to take anything I can get. For example, one day I spent the whole day cleaning the house. Everything sparkled and I was very pleased with myself. When my husband came home, he told me how nice everything looked, it made me feel wonderful.

We are constantly working on the complimenting thing. I try to show him what I mean by complimenting him myself. If he looks especially good in his police uniform, I tell him so. The look on his face is worth the effort, and sometimes he even returns the compliment!

Remember when you first met and found yourself talking for hours and hours as you got to know each other? So often, when we marry, those conversations die off as we go about taking care of the business of life. We don't make

time to talk to each other like we used to. Your feelings about your spouse may not have changed, but you just express them differently.

In the beginning, you listen to the other person to learn more about them. Once you know these things, you may feel like you've run out of things to say and don't find any need to really listen anymore.

However, women experience greater intimacy by sharing their thoughts and feelings. This might make most men cringe, but it's a fact that most women are talkers – even if what they have to say might not seem important. This makes men feel like they have to solve whatever problems their wives are having putting undue pressure on them.

Instead of trying to get your partner to talk, try to get them to listen. When you just sit and listen to your partner without the pressure of having to provide solutions to problems, you will relax more and be more willing to share your own victories and losses. When you take the time to talk – even about the mundane things – you'll realize that you're in this marriage together and you will experience even great closeness!

You've heard people say that it's the little things that mean the most in a relationship. When you're trying to get your romance back, those little things can make the biggest difference in a marriage filled with romance or a marriage filled with angst.

What little things are we talking about? Taking out the trash, unloading the dishwasher, washing her car, rubbing his feet after a rough day. In the beginning, you might feel like this is the best way to show your love, but after the marriage, maybe the fact that you are sharing your income and lives are enough. Unfortunately, this is just not true.

Men and women alike appreciate the little things. When you can express your love by doing something small, your partner will know that you realize those little things can add up. You are making your partner happy and they will feel like you are really a team.

In early courtship, a man is on the hunt. He is completely focused on winning over the woman he cares for and will do whatever it takes to be successful. His ability to focus so intently makes a big impact on the woman who is the center of his desire. Problems begin only after he succeeds. Having won her, he relaxes and redirects his energy towards a new goal.

Most marriages start out very loving and both partners are happy as clams. Then, as months passed, one or the other might become disenchanted. You talk less and less. The change might be so gradual that you don't even notice it. Eventually, it becomes clear that one of you is genuinely unhappy.

At this point, you have to realize that time is what your partner needs in order to feel loved and needed again. Try devoting 20 minutes exclusively to them. Make them the focus of those 20 minutes and shut out everything else that might try to distract you. Employ some of the tactics we've already talked about: listen to their concerns, talk about your day, dream about the future, and reminisce about the past.

Devoting this time to your partner will be freeing, liberating, and a moment you can share. Both of you will find yourselves looking forward to that 20 minutes and saving up your energy to reconnecting and reclaiming your passion for each other!

Be spontaneous with your partner it is a way to help your relationship flourish. Being spontaneous with your partner can enrich and strengthen your intimate moments.

Try something that you have been wanting to do. Don't be shy, express yourself and see what works!

Spontaneity is the spice of life, or so they say, but sometimes the "fly by the seat of your pants" philosophy is the best way to live. It's new, fresh, and fun! Do something out of the ordinary, surprise your partner and have fun doing it!

This doesn't have to be something huge and monumental. It can be as simple as taking off for a day's jaunt to the local museum. Maybe you'll put together your mate's favorite meal and serve it by candlelight. Better yet, serve it to them in your altogether! What a great way to show your fun side!

Talk, listen and laugh together become best friends. You will soon start creating a bond of intimacy. Be sincere open and honest. Communicate about love, sex and the relationship. You won't be sorry that you did!

Create consistent times to talk about your relationship. When a couple feels like their marriage is dry and dull, think about what you usually talk about when you're alone. Most often it will be work, the kids, finances, and upcoming events. At this point, ask how much time you spend focusing on your relationship — on your love life. Usually, you'll find yourself noticing that you focus very little time on your love life.

Romance is sure to wane if you spend the majority of your time discussing the mundane tasks and obligations of life. The next time you're alone with your spouse, focus on your marriage. Lovers who still have fire between them are in the habit of discussing their relationship, talking about how their love was born, and sharing with each other what they feel.

Don't forget to date. That's right; you can actually date after you're married! Think back to your courtship, and

recapture the excitement of those well-planned, anxiously awaited dates.

Wear your best clothes, go to a fancy restaurant, hold hands, and look into each other's eyes like you did when you were dating. You wouldn't have even thought about canceling a date before you were married, so don't let the mundane duties of life get in the way of time with each other now.

Go on a weekend getaway at least twice a year. As enriching as dates are, you also need extended periods of unhurried, relaxing time to nurture your love.

Go somewhere conducive to letting go of tension and daily concerns. Wherever you go, make sure times of romance are central to your daily schedule. That means walks along the water, long naps in the afternoon, and evenings filled with moonlit dinners and pleasant conversation

In fact, there are many, many ways to rekindle romance in your marriage. Let's look at some more ways to reconnect with your spouse and reintroduce romance into your marriage.

EVEN MORE WAYS TO RE-CONNECT

Spend lots of time dreaming together. There is something wildly attractive about merging our hopes and dreams for the future with someone else's. And working toward the realization of shared dreams contributes dramatically to the level of romance in marriage.

Indeed, the best relationships involve people who have a well-formed vision of the life they are pursuing together. I encourage you to have a dream for the next year of your

marriage, another for the next five years, and another for the next 10 years.

Accentuate physical affection. Obviously, sex is an important component of any married couple's romantic relationship. But there is so much more to physical affection than intercourse. Do you and your partner regularly hug, hold hands, smooch, nuzzle, and walk arm in arm? Touching is a ready-made reservoir of relational energy and intimacy.

Place a high priority on laughter and levity. Laughing together creates a magical bond. When you and your partner find humor in the same thing, you are fused together at that moment. Relive funny events from your lives, swap stories, watch wacky movies together — whatever makes you laugh, do it often.

Regularly communicate your mutual significance to each other. Look for every opportunity to tell your spouse, "You are the most important person in my life."

You can convey this verbally, in writing, or through acts of kindness. This can be something small like bringing home your mate's favorite ice cream or buying them a book with a touching inscription inside. These small gestures assure your partner that they are in your thoughts when we're apart, and this draws you closer to each other.

My husband was working a night shift and when he came home the next morning, I was greeted by some yellow wildflowers in a drinking glass sitting on the kitchen table. Now, they were ragweed blossoms, and I am allergic, so when I asked him what those were, he told me, "I saw them by the side of the road and thought they were pretty – just like you."

I took a Claritin and smiled that my husband was thinking of me while he was toiling away at his job. It didn't matter what kind of flower it was, it was the gesture that

meant the most. He got huge brownie points for that one! Even if my eyes did swell up!

Eat by candlelight. It doesn't matter if it's a Domino's pizza or a five-course gourmet meal, candles can present an atmosphere that is amazingly conducive to romance. Have you ever eaten pizza by candlelight? Try it! You'll be surprised at how romantic it really is!

Pay attention when your spouse mentions things he or she likes or expresses interest in something that could make a good gift, such as a new CD, a book, or theater, concert, sports tickets.

Be on the lookout for ideas for birthday, holiday, and anniversary gifts, plus "no reason" surprise gifts. It's very flattering to know that someone really tried to find a gift that was just what you wanted.

Frequently offer foot massages, shoulder massages, and full-body massages to your spouse. You'll get plenty of romantic brownie points in your "relationship bank account" if you keep some great-smelling lotion handy and take ten minutes to massage your spouse's tired feet at the end of a long work day.

Note: If you expect to be rewarded for your efforts by sex, you won't accumulate any points for being romantic. Your spouse will just think you have an ulterior motive when you offer a massage in the future. Do this unselfishly and enjoy the rewards!

Giving sweet cards and letters to your spouse can be romantic, as can emails and phone messages that share your feelings and passion. Handwritten letters sent through the mail are becoming more and more of a rarity. That's good for you because that means your spouse will think you're really romantic for taking the time to write a love letter by hand and mail it. That will make more of an impact

than just sending an email if you want to get extra brownie points.

Another way to be romantic is to look for opportunities to pamper and spoil your spouse. That might be letting a spouse sleep in late while you watch the kids, or it could be telling your partner to sit down and relax while you clean up after dinner.

The key is in the delivery of the offer. You might say, "Nothing's too good for my sweetheart" or "You're such a love. It's fun to pamper you." You can accompany your words with a hug or kiss

Talking in front of your spouse to someone else about your partner's good points is romantic. Take full advantage of opportunities to say, 'I'm so lucky to have such a supportive wife (or husband)-she's such a treasure. I'm a lucky man.'

You can also do this when you're talking on the phone and know that your spouse is within listening range. If you're not sure your partner heard you, when you get off the phone ask, "Did you hear me telling my sister what a great husband you are? I was really bragging on you!"

In the romance department, flowers, plants, candy, or a special home-cooked meal never go out of favor. Many females love to receive beautiful fresh flowers or a box of delicious chocolate candy. Both husbands and wives can appreciate the efforts of a partner to put together an intimate, special home-cooked meal by candlelight with music playing and flowers on the table.

Surprise your spouse with a framed picture of the two of you in a setting that will bring back pleasant memories. Another option is to frame a picture of your spouse that shows him or her in a flattering way and let your partner know how much you love the photo. Keep it on your

nightstand, computer, dresser, or desk and let your spouse see you looking at it admiringly.

We talked about taking surprise getaways. Why don't you take the initiative to plan a surprise weekend outing? Call and make all the arrangements ahead of time.

The outing doesn't have to be expensive or complex. It might be as simple as planning a picnic at a nearby scenic spot. You might prepare the surprise picnic lunch when your spouse is in the shower.

Or you might make arrangements for a restaurant to pack a gourmet lunch for the two of you that you could pick up on your way out of town.

Music that you and your spouse both like can set a romantic tone. If you see a movie that you both enjoyed a lot, you might consider buying the sound track as a surprise gift the following week. You could also select a song that you both like and decide to make it "your song." Or you could pick a song and tell your spouse that it reminds you of him or her for some positive reason.

Celebrate every occasion you can think of—the anniversary of the day you met, when you became engaged, your marriage anniversary, your birthdays, seeing the full moon, and anything else you can come up with.

You can toast with champagne (or non-alcoholic champagne) and perhaps have a celebration meal. But it can be just as fun to make a big deal out of going out for an ice cream cone to celebrate.

There are hundreds of men and women out there who don't feel like they can be romantic. It goes against their every feeling of comfortableness and ease. It feels foreign and wrong, but being romantic is important in re-kindling those feelings you had when you first got married.

ADVICE FOR THE ROMANTICALLY CHALLENGED

For some, romance comes easily and naturally. For others, being romantic can be difficult at best. Whether extremely capable or a bit bumbling, we all need to make an effort to keep the romance alive and well in our relationships.

One of the most important things to remember when it comes to being romantic is that it isn't so much what we do, but that we try to do something - anything. Romance is one of those things which even a lame attempt beats the heck out of no attempt at all.

So for all those who let their fear of looking silly or their lack of a romantic flare stop them from at least trying to be romantic, quit worrying and start doing! That's the wonderful thing about romance - even if you do come off looking a bit inept, it just adds to the charm.

Simply put, you need not be a poet to write a love letter. You don't have to be gourmet chef to prepare a candle lit dinner for two. As long as what you do or say comes from the heart, you can't go wrong.

Additionally, it's often the little things that say the most, so don't feel being romantic takes a grand gesture or requires an expensive gift - that's just not the case. Sometimes hiding a simple love note for your partner to find during the day is all it takes to make them feel wanted and special.

Okay, so now that we're sufficiently pumped-up to romance the socks off our partners, what are we going to do for them? Ah yes, the granddaddy of all romantic stumbling blocks - the idea.

I would venture to guess, even the greatest lovers of all time drew a blank occasionally when it came to coming up with a great romantic notion. When this happens, we're probably putting too much thought into the WHAT, rather than the HOW.

When we concentrate only on what type of romantic gesture to make, this can often be a block to the free flow of ideas. If we approach the problem from a different perspective - considering HOW we want our partner to feel, suddenly ideas begin to come to mind. This gives us a frame work of sorts to build upon. Give it a try the next time you find yourself searching for a good romantic idea.

We also need to consider our partner's likes and dislikes, and what would be meaningful to them. Remember, this is about them, not us. And guys, although sexy lingerie is wonderful, are you really buying it for your partner, or for yourself?

Often, if we keep our eyes and ears open, our partners will give us clues to what they find romantic, etc. Sometimes the very things they do for us are a good indication of what they would like us to do for them.

Keep in mind, romance is more about feelings and emotions, than it is about things. Mood, spontaneity, and speaking from the heart are much more important than anything you could ever buy in a store.

Being romantic is nothing more than the means by which we convey to our partners all the loving thoughts and feelings we have for them in our hearts and minds. Even for those of us who find it difficult to express these things, it's important to try, and try often. Your partner will love you for it, and your relationship will flourish because of it.

That's the thing about relationships, like anything else, the more effort and thought we put into them, the better

they become. Now go out there and put a little romance in your relationship!

Do you need a few suggestions? We've got some for you!

ROMANTIC THINGS YOU CAN DO

There are all kinds of things you can do to bring romance back into your marriage. Many of them are really simple, but they can pack a wallop when you put them into practice. Consider some of these suggestions:

- Take a wine tasting class together.
- Go to a reading by a writer you both admire. These take place at libraries, book stores and universities all the time.
- Spend an afternoon together in a ceramics workshop.
- Sign up for a cooking lesson with a chef.
- Start your own book club for two. Agree to read the same book and then discuss it.
- Take a dance class together. Ballroom dancing and Latin dance are famously romantic.
- Learn a new sport together. Consider taking tennis or golf lessons together.
- Hop on a roller coaster together. Feel free to cling to one another - and scream!
- Make a list together of all the places you'd like to visit. Then start planning to find the time for these getaways. Most of all go there!

- Paint a room in an unusual color. Maybe you are both tired of looking at the same walls and wish to liven them up with something more inviting. Better yet, make it your bedroom, and then spend A LOT of time in there enjoying that new color!
- Send love notes to your mate. Post them everywhere – on the bathroom mirror, on the dashboard of their car, inside a briefcase, or even inside their coffee cup! In these notes, tell them how gorgeous, handsome, beautiful, sexy you think they are. Tell them how much you love them. Be creative be specific – even be naughty!
- Surprise your sweetie with tickets to an event you think s/he'd really enjoy. Hide them where s/he'll find them.
- Take her/him out on a date where s/he gets to choose whatever s/he wants to do, even if it's something you wouldn't ordinarily want to do (remember to be gracious).
- Take turns planning weekly dates, where you take turns deciding what to do. A date could be a picnic in a park, a drive in the country, a trip to an art gallery, or a movie.
- Turn your home into a fine restaurant for one evening. Surprise your lover with a menu, music, candles, a delicious meal, and table service (that's you). If you're frequently too busy to find time together, make spending time together a priority. Show your partner that s/he is your priority.
- Take a day off from all responsibilities, including the telephone, and just do what you both really want to do. Be completely spontaneous, and if you can't agree, take turns doing what you both want.

- Devote yourself to your partner's wishes for a fixed amount of time. S/he gets to decide whatever s/he wants you to do (assuming you agree to it). S/he may want to be held, have you read poetry, receive a massage, be understood about something, have you clean the kitchen, or be taken out for coffee. Taking turns with this can be a lot of fun.
- Be playful with each other. Feed each other with your fingers, stay in bed all day, take a walk in the rain, sing old tunes you both know, or have a pillow fight. It doesn't matter what you do, just that you have fun again.
- Find a time to look deeply and lovingly into your lover's eyes; words are not necessary. Look at her/his face and see her/his beauty and uniqueness. Tell her/him what you see and feel. Take the risk to feel the depth of your emotions and to share that with your lover.
- At night before you fall asleep, tell her/him something that you love about her/him. Remember, you're the one who knows what your lover really enjoys.
- Surprise her/him with something special-don't wait for a birthday or anniversary.
- Compliment each other lovingly in public and in privacy, show affection for each other.
- Show them how much you really care by being responsive, caring and loving whole heartedly. Do the little things that say I love you and care for you.
- Respect each other whole heartedly, partners who treat each other with kind and respect know that it is essential for having a deep connections and loving relationship.

- Be a good partner regularly get them something you know they will like and enjoy.
- Don't let negative or annoying comments bother you. Discuss the negativity when you are both calm.
- Take responsibility for your own growth, appearance and health.
- Communicating without fear is absolutely essential to building the deepest kind of friendship and intimate partner.

The idea is that whatever you do; make it special – and JUST DO IT! Don't be afraid to let your imagination go wild, or to appear silly. Your partner will enjoy the love and thought you've put into it, and over time you may find your relationship feeling vibrant once more.

Inevitably, conflicts will arise. There's no reason why you can't fight – it's a part of marriage, but you should take a few suggestions on how to make sure your fights don't impede your romantic feelings.

FIGHTING FAIR

Traditionally, when couples fight, have misunderstandings, discover a lack of things in common, or confront the challenge of incompatibility, their first instinct is to flee while rationalizing to themselves "this will never work, we're just too different." It really doesn't have to be this way.

Arguments will occur in your marriage. It's a fact. Those arguments can wear away at your good feelings toward your partner and wreak havoc with the way you get

along. Learn how to fight fair, and you won't have to worry about your fights eroding away at your romantic feelings.

With commitment, courage, and the willingness to exchange stale, unconscious behavior patterns for fresh, healthy choices, you can learn how to transform the differences into catalysts for growth, instead of fodder for heartache. Here are nine suggestions to make the differences between partners make lovers out of adversaries.

Our first reaction to conflict is to run away from it rather than face it. It's natural, but running away doesn't help resolve the conflict, it only escalates it. Your goal is to co-create and discover a new way of being together, a resolution that satisfies both of you. Therefore, each of you needs to speak your half of the problem and listen respectfully and with genuine curiosity to your partner's point of view.

First of all, you need to define the issue. Truthfully express what is disturbing you in as much detail as possible. Don't leave your partner in the dark when it comes to what is troubling you. Use your words and express yourself fully. This is the essential first step toward conflict resolution.

Realize that it's alright to feel your feelings. Experience and communicate your feelings as honestly and openly as you can in the moment you are feeling them.

Remember that you care. Keep in mind that ongoing relationships are a mosaic made up of many facets, and there is more to your partner and your relationship than any one issue. You need to work through that issue and not let it define who either of you are as a person.

Beware of self-sabotage. Stay aware of what's going on inside you during a rough spot in the relationship, don't allow old negative behavior patterns to swamp the present

moment. This could be the worst thing you can do when in conflict with the one you love

It's easy to assign blame all on yourself when there is a problem. Just remember that it doesn't matter who has the initial problem, what matters is that you resolve it in a way that is best for both of you!

Change your mindset. Open yourself to the fact that any issue can be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways, otherwise you'll continue to stay in a rut and progressively dig the hole deeper with every conflict.

Take personal responsibility, but not too much! Ask yourself in what way or ways do you contribute to the situation that upsets you or your partner. Rarely if ever in an ongoing relationship does a difficulty arise that has not been contributed to by both partners.

Remember that your partner is not you. Learn to internalize and understand that your partner is not you. Your resolutions will be respectful of your differences only when you both find ways to empathize with the other's point of view.

Be consciously creative. Hold the other in your consciousness as you want to be held. Appreciate and value the other's experience in the ways that it is different from yours. This is especially helpful as it will keep you from transferring blame onto your partner when it's just a problem that needs to be solved.

Seek both resolutions and solutions. As you seek a resolution, remember that you are two different people, and the resolution needs to reveal not an either/or but a both/and quality. Resolutions aren't about winning; they're about a process of respect and intimacy, growth and emergence.

Guard against the very dangerous belief that if you're having difficulty with your partner, that means your

relationship is in trouble. More than likely it means your relationship needs a tune-up and an oil change. Only in romantic fantasy does everything go smoothly without attention, care and change.

So we've given you some great tools to try and bring romance back into your marriage. Do you want something a little more specific?

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO

Even though most people should come up with their sweetness off the top of their head based on how they feel for their partner, some people simply do not have the capacity to come up with their own ideas. Let's go ahead and give you some specifics to work with.

You know that we have said it's a very romantic idea to leave notes for your spouse. What do you say in those notes? Try a few of these on for size.

- I'm so glad you're my husband/wife
- I smile when I think about you!
- You make my life wonderful
- Remember when we said "I Do", well I still do!
- I'm so glad the "better" is more than the "worse"
- When I met you, I couldn't believe how lucky I was. Since we've been married, I can't believe how lucky I AM!
- Without you, I'm just not me!
- You complete me. (Kudos to "Jerry Maguire"!)

- The most amazing part of my life is YOU!
- Let's run away together – to the bedroom!
- You make every day a great day.
- If I didn't have you, I'd be lost
- Thanks for picking me!
- We may not be perfect, but we're perfect for each other!
- Today is a great day because the first thing I saw this morning was your beautiful face.
- I'd do it all over again.
- Out of all the people in the world, fate led me to you. Thank heavens for fate!

They might sound a little cheesy, but, believe me, when your husband (or wife) reads those words, they'll swoon. Yes, even the guys will love it!

Want some ideas for some wonderful gifts for your spouse? Even if you don't have much money, you can come up with a great way to show your husband or wife how much you love them. Give them a gift!

GREAT WAYS TO SPOIL YOUR SPOUSE

Romance doesn't always involve candy and flowers. Sometimes it's small things that make your loved one believe that you are truly glad to have them in your life.

Take some time to put some thought into how you want to pamper your significant other and then do it!

But if you need some ideas, we have a few for you!

Most people have music that means something to them. Even if you don't have a favorite song, surely you can think of some type of music that means something to you.

Remember making mix tapes of your favorite songs when you were a kid? Do that for your husband or wife. Pick out a few songs that make you think of them and burn them to a CD or record them to a cassette. Pick out songs that will tell them how you feel about them.

Need a little help? Here are a few suggestions:

- "Wing Beneath My Wings" by Bette Midler
- "If I Don't Have You" by Whitney Houston
- "The One" by Elton John
- "You're Beautiful" by John Mayer
- "Because You Loved Me" by Celine Dion
- "My Best Friend" by Tim McGraw
- "Can You Feel The Love Tonight" by Elton John
- "I Love The Way You Love Me" by John Michael Montgomery
- "Wonderful Tonight" by Eric Clapton
- "Forever and Ever, Amen" by Randy Travis
- "When You Love Someone" by Bryan Adams
- "In Your Eyes" by Peter Gabriel
- "Truly, Madly, Deeply" by Savage Garden
- "Amazed" by Lone Star

Even if none of these songs have any significance to you and your partner, imagine how please they will be to know that you picked all of them out just for them to show how much you love them?

Need some more romantic ideas? No problem!

So often, guys – and even gals – go to the video store to rent a movie for you to watch as a couple. Now, guys have a different kind of entertainment in mind than girls do. No, I'm not talking porn, I'm talking about those action flicks that girls find – well, a little yawn inducing.

On the flip side, gals like to watch the romantic comedies where everything works out in the end and the guy gets the gal, etc., etc. Guys find THIS type of movie more than yawn inducing; they can often find a movie like this positively excruciating!

Where you make amazing romantic points here is when you pick out a movie just because you know your spouse would love it – even if you will hate it. I've done this countless times – rented a movie that I know I have no desire to watch, but I know my hubby will.

Then you get additional points when you actually sit through the whole movie without falling asleep. Want to really impress your mate? Talk about the movie without rolling your eyes! You'd be surprised at how much it might mean to them! What this says is that you actually care that they like something you don't, but you're willing to give it a chance because you love them that much!

You know those sweet things you think of when you are together or when you're apart and just thinking about your honey? Well, next time a thought pops in your mind, voice it! Girls especially love to know what wonderful things go on in the inner workings of their guy's minds, so chances are, guys may also enjoy a few catch phrases.

Pick up the phone and let them know what that thought was! Who knows? It could lead to much, much more!

Spend time with his or her family. The seriousness of a relationship can sometimes be gauged by how one interacts with his or her partner's family. Spending time at your honey's family's home can also serve to strengthen your relationship.

Snuggle up and take a nap together. There is nothing quite like falling asleep and waking up in the arms of the one you love.

Play romantic music and dance together. Slowly dancing around the room to a favorite song can mean so much more when it is completely unexpected.

Go on a picnic! Gather your favorite foods, drinks and desserts, a comfortable blanket and some utensils, plates, cups and napkins and head out for the park on a beautiful day. Go for a walk in the park while you are there and enjoy all of the nature around you.

My husband did this for me once, and it was an amazing experience! He picked me up from work on my lunch hour and we went to the park where he pulled out a basket filled with my most favorite foods.

We spent the whole time feeding each other and really talking like we hadn't done in a very long time. It was amazingly erotic, and let me know that he really did notice what I liked and what was important to me!

Carry his or her photo in your wallet. Keep your sweetie present at all times by putting a photo of him/her or the two of you together in your wallet, at work, in your car or wherever you think you would most like to see it.

When your husband or wife sees that you care enough to carry you with them, it's a beautiful feeling to know they

are proud of you and want to show you off – even when you aren't there!

Bring your sweetheart to visit places you came to know and love in your childhood. Parks, playgrounds, the zoo, pumpkin patches, museums, amusement parks, beaches, boardwalks and any other attractions that you enjoyed as a child can bring back happy memories to share with your significant other.

When you share with your partner, you give them a portal into your heart. By giving them your memories, you are saying it's alright for them to remember them with you. There's nothing more romantic and more intimate.

Share your daydreams. Whatever makes your heart soar at thoughts of the future, consider sharing those ideas with your special one. Daydreaming together can be a very romantic and emotional experience, whether it is fully in jest or in a degree of serious contemplation.

An added perk to sharing your daydreams is that you are giving your partner a way to know exactly who and what is valuable to you. Who know – maybe your spouse will want to make that daydream a reality!

I am a huge fan of massage as a way to connect or re-connect with your spouse. Sure, you can rub your own shoulders, but it's just not as electric as when the one you love puts their hands on your body to knead your sore muscles into ecstasy.

Don't have a clue on how to do it? Well, let's give you some tips. After all, that's what we're here for!

MASSAGES CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE!

There's very few things you can do for your spouse than giving them a massage. Who doesn't love the touch of the one you love? It's even better when it helps relieve your stress and bring you closer!

Massage doesn't have to be sexual either. It can be an expression of love that will last for a very long time. You owe it to yourself and your partner to learn what a good massage is all about.

Here are some tips to help you prepare for a massage.

- Lock the door and unplug the phone.
- Be sure you have the time to spend with your partner. A massage is not the type of experience you want to rush.
- Turn down the light. The lighting should be soft and indirect. Candlelight is perfect. Even natural sunlight shining through a window in the afternoon is terrific.
- You might want it quiet. Although I think we all like Barry White and other soft sensual music, you might prefer a quiet room. This will help you feel and hear what your partner enjoys.
- You will want the room to be warm. Almost 80 degrees will allow a naked partner to be comfortable.
- Make sure your hands are warm. You can accomplish this by rubbing them together thoroughly or by taking a bath together.

- Cleanliness. Although it isn't essential to be clean before a massage, your partner will certainly be more relaxed if they are clean.

This massage will involve every area of the body include such places as behind the ears and between the toes. Be sure your partner will be comfortable by taking a bath. You might also make sure that your fingernails are clean and trimmed neatly - not necessarily short, just neat.

- Aroma. A nice scented candle will provide the warmth, light, and scent that will set the mood. Women might prefer a lighter, more floral scent (rose or jasmine might be appropriate). Men might prefer a more rugged, woody scent like cedar or sandalwood
- You will want to give a massage on a flat, firm surface. A firm mattress is acceptable; using pillows on the floor is good too. A massage table is best, but not everyone has one of these.
- The massage receiver should prepare like they are preparing for bed. They might want to remove their contacts, their makeup, and have their teeth brushed. They are about to experience something special and might want to sleep or make love (or both) afterward.

It is best to keep in constant contact with your partner. As you move to different areas of the body do so in a continuous manner. Keeping contact helps the massage flow smoothly and increases intimacy.

Use pressure that feels good to your partner. Listen to their responses and let them tell you how much pressure is just right.

Take your time. Relax and enjoy this intimate time together.

Keep your movements rhythmic, even, and symmetric. By following smooth patterns your partner will be able to understand what is happening and will relax more deeply.

Use an Oil or Massage Cream. Either allows your hands to glide smoothly over your partner. The effect of warm oil being smoothly spread over your body is absolutely delicious. As you move to new areas of the body, start by spreading warm oil with your hands. This makes an astounding prelude to massage.

You can start a massage on any portion of the body. You will want to be somewhat continuous and symmetric. Here are two suggestions:

First, start with the feet, work up the back of the legs, the back, neck, arms, chest, abdomen, and then front of the legs. Ending with the abdomen and the front of the legs allows you to direct blood flow to the genitals. This is a great order to use if you want to make love.

You can also start with the chest, abdomen, front of the legs, feet, back of the legs, buttocks, and then back. This order ends with the back and leaves your partner fully relaxed and quite possibly sleepy. This is a terrific massage if your partner needs to relax and rest.

So many people I know love having their back rubbed. This can be so very relaxing, but only if it's done correctly. When performing a back massage, here are some great tips to consider:

- You might feel most comfortable kneeling astride your partner.
- Your partner might find that quite a bit of nervous tension disappears after a back massage.

- You might find that up to a third of the time spent on a massage will be spent on the back. I doubt any of us will complain.
- The back muscles are usually massaged in three groups. A successful back rub will cover all three groups: the long muscles that run parallel to the spine, the flat muscle groups that cover the top of the back and lower neck, and the wide band of muscles that stretches from the spine to the side of the back.
- Begin the back rub with a simple circulation (sweeping motion) that touches all three areas in a simple, continuous stroke. You needn't press hard during this stroke.
- Then make your hands flat and place your fingers facing the spine. Slide your hands up the spine, press with medium pressure. When you reach the neck turn your hands so that your fingers massage along the top of the shoulders and then down the outer sides of the back.

When you come back down the outer sides of the back, turn your hands back to the original position.

Repeat this circulation movement about ten times.

Then you can move on to pressing the back. Pressing the back is the most dramatic massage stroke available.

In order to get the technique right, you need to understand one principle fact about massage. Massage is the manipulation of muscle tissue. When pressing on the back, you will have two ridges of muscle that run just outboard of the spine. These ridges are where you should concentrate your attention.

When pressing up the back start at the very, very base of the spine (even as low as the upper buttock). Apply

pressure with the heel of each hand. Lean forward as you press. Slide your hands along the ridges of muscle from the very base of the spine until you reach the shoulder blades.

In contrast to the circulation stroke, don't bring your hands back along the far outside of the back. Bring them back just outboard of where you just massaged.

You will know when you are doing this stroke properly. Your partner will moan with delight.

At least ten strokes are appropriate here. Your partner will probably ask for more. Entertain them with different variations (small circles as you glide up the spine, use your thumbs in place of the heel of your hand, scratch their back as you return to the base of the spine, use your imagination).

Using your thumbs you can concentrate on the muscle tissue just outboard of the spine. You can glide up these muscles best if you use a liberal amount of massage oil. Small circular strokes in this area feel absolutely divine.

We pretty much can guarantee that anyone – woman or man – will love a foot massage. But massaging the foot involves more than just kneading the foot.

Our feet take a beating in daily life. Who wouldn't want to lie down at the end of the day and receive a foot massage? Our dogs are tired.

The first stroke in a good foot massage is called a circulation stroke. The name implies that it increase blood flow in the tissues of the foot.

Grasp the foot with one hand and stroke the top with the other. You can use light pressure along the top of the foot. Moderate pressure might be required on the bottom of the foot to prevent tickling your partner.

Continue rubbing and stroking your partners entire foot. Twenty times on the top and ten times on the bottom is nice.

The next step is to rotate the foot. When you are doing this, only slight movement is necessary. This move is not a stretch; it is just a movement to relax the foot and ankle.

Support the foot with one hand. With the other hand, gently move the foot through its natural range of motion. Do not push firmly. Simply and slowly glide the foot in an oval-type motion. As you slowly rotate the foot, you may find the range of motion increases slightly.

Rotate the foot 3-5 times in each direction.

Then you need to stroke the foot. This type of stroke won't relax just the feet; it will relax the whole body.

Start with your fingertips right where the toes meet the foot. Use both hands to press down between the bones of the foot. Slide your up the foot toward the ankle, when your fingers reach ankle level, wrap your fingers around the ankle and massage the front of the ankle joint with your thumbs.

You should generally look for muscle tissue to rub when giving a massage. This area is firm with bone, tendons and ligaments. Try to do your best to treat the muscle tissue you find with thorough kneading.

The next step is to flex and rotate the bones of the foot. This stroke feels really nice when the top of the foot is sore from standing or walking.

Press the heel of each hand on the outer edges of the foot. You will be curling the top of the foot. When you curl the foot you will be able to massage the muscle between the bones with your thumbs. While curling the foot you will also

end up pressing your fingertips into the underside of the foot. This feels nice as well.

An excellent head and neck massage is a great follow-up!

Just behind and below the ears you can feel the lower edge of the skull. There is a large band of neck muscles that meet the cranium here. Stroke these muscles smoothly.

With your partner lying on their back put your hands underneath their shoulders and lift up. As you move your hands up and over the shoulders your partner's weight will massage the muscles thoroughly.

Then move your hands to the temples. Buddhists believe that the center of the forehead (sometimes called the third eye) is the center of the soul. Your partner might begin to believe this as you stroke their skin firmly with your thumbs.

You can then try the forehead press. The trick here is to apply pressure slowly. This stroke can be used to cure headaches or just to relax.

Gently place one hand on the forehead. Place the other hand upon this one. Slowly add pressure while maintaining even force upon the forehead. You can exert a fair amount of force (your partner will let you know if it is too much). Hold the pressure for a silent count of 10 seconds.

Then it's time for the cheeks. Place your hands flat along your partners face. Move your hands in circles. Although this move results in some pretty goofy poses it is quite relaxing. A good massage relaxes muscles that people aren't even aware they have.

When you use your arms and hands as much as I do (I'm a writer, after all!), a good arm and hand massage can be absolute heaven!

Massaging the arms is enjoyable for both partners. For the receiver it relaxing and enjoyable; for the giver is satisfyingly easy and effective.

Begin by placing your partners hand alongside your chest. This relieves your partner from holding their arm in the air. Knead the muscles of your partner's arms using both hands. Using your thumbs to knead the muscles of the arms is best.

When you roll the arms in a massage, it will stimulate the muscle in a different direction. Place your hands on either side of your partners arm. Keep your hands flat. Moving your hands in opposite directions has an effect similar to rolling dough into a long strand. This back and forth motion stimulates the muscle of your partners arm.

Remember to be rhythmic and predictable when you do this maneuver so that your partner can relax.

Then you can move on to a snaking of the arms. This is a truly fantastic yet unusual stroke in the art of massage!

Hold your partner's arm up with one hand. With the other hand start at the shoulder and grip the muscle tissue between your thumb and four fingers. Quickly grip and release the muscles while sliding your hand up toward the wrist. This pulsing effect is quite enjoyable. Complete this movement 7-10 times.

You can wind up a great massage session with a hand massage. I can speak from experience, here, even though the foot massage is awesome, a hand massage can almost make you see nirvana!

Use a massage oil or a simple olive oil from your kitchen. Start by pouring about half a teaspoon of oil onto the palm of your hand, and then rub the oil over both your palms.

Gently spread the oil around your partner's hand using light stroking movements. Move your thumbs away from each other, from the centre of the hand towards the outsides. Do this several times

Now move your thumbs between the tendons of the back of the hand, pushing up towards the wrist. You also can try small circular movements between the tendons if you like. Do this several times as well.

Take each finger in turn between your own finger and thumb. Make small twisting or circular movements up and down each finger, finishing with their thumb.

Move your thumbs away from each other, from the centre of the palm. Press more firmly with your own thumbs. Make small circular movements with your thumbs all over their palm

Finish the massage by holding the persons hand with one hand, and sliding your other hand up their arm. You can do this a few times.

Now do the same on their other hand!

Massaging your partner isn't just therapeutic for them – it's therapeutic for you as a couple! It can be erotic if you want it to be, it can be simply a way for you to connect as a couple, or it can introduce a whole new intimacy into your relationship that you never thought could be there.

Don't expect too much, but remember that massage is an excellent way to connect with your partner and re-ignite not only romantic feelings, but feelings of oneness as well. When you work together as a team in this relationship, you should treat each other to the perks of being part of a couple as well!

CONCLUSION

Every marriage needs a healthy dose of on-going romance to add spice, delight, and fun to the relationship. It's not enough to just start out with a sizzling romance. You have to find a way to keep the romance alive as the months and years accumulate.

One of the marital challenges many couples face is how to live together without losing that special romantic spark. It's all-too-easy to lose the role of lover along the way.

When this happens, spouses often start relating to each other as they would to a friend or a sibling. Parents can begin to feel they are only "business partners" joined together to raise their children and keep the household running.

There are certain things in every relationship that should remain sacred. You must trust each other, you must nurture each other, and you must show each other that you care about what the other person feels.

If there is a conflict, disagreement or challenge that comes up, resolve that you will talk to each other instead of venting your frustrations with a friend or co-worker. This should be a sacred agreement with each other.

This means telling the other person what you are thinking as soon as you have sorted it out yourselves. Don't feel like you have to hide or sugar-coat the truth about a situation or unload on a friend how you are truly feeling without first telling each other.

This doesn't mean you should never talk to friends and other family members about your thoughts or what's happening in our lives. Actually, it's quite the contrary.

What is important is that you agree to tell each other first, things that are personal and feelings that come up about the other person.

If you find that you have been complaining to other people about your partner or someone close to you and you are not telling your partner how you are feeling, stop.

By talking to others first about your issues instead of the person involved, you will continue to erode the safety and trust in your relationship. By talking to others about your issues instead of the person your conflict is with, you could be playing the role of the victim or martyr.

Believe it or not, you may actually be enjoying the sympathy and attention from other people that you are getting from complaining about the situation with your partner.

If you want to build trust and create a close, connected relationship, this kind of behavior has to stop. Choosing to let your partner know where you stand and what is going on inside you is not only a way to build trust but also a way to deepen your connection as well.

When men and women enter into a relationship, what they are really looking for is a best friend; some one they know will love them no matter what. Deep inside of you there are powers that if discovered and used would allow you to achieve all that you ever dreamed or imagined you could become.

If only relationships could be as exciting and romantic as they were when you first met. You know, all that intensity, enthusiasm, excitement and, of course, sex. I'm sure you've felt it: hating being apart, even for a short time; being unable to concentrate on anything else for very long; and waiting to be together again.

When you are together, you hang onto every word, marvel at every part of your lover's body, and feel so wonderful, you smile all the time.

Does this all have to end? Are relationships doomed to predictable and boring routines of shopping, preparing meals, doing the dishes, laundry, watching T.V., talking about work, taking care of the kids, fighting, and sleeping? Definitely not!

In fact, long term lovers can become even more enchanted with each other, since their passion grows from a deeper knowledge and fondness for each other. But time alone does not help a relationship to flourish-it requires a willingness to take risks, and special, persistent attention.

The fact is, all marriages get bogged down with dull duties and routine responsibilities. Day after day, we get up in the morning, go about our business, and retire to sleep at night — and usually fail to recognize our marriage's desperate need for attention.

We need romance. We need to snuggle in front of a roaring fire, linger over a delicious meal, and take time to find out what's going on in our partner's life. We need to hear these miraculous words whispered over and over: "I love you — and I will for as long as I live." If you're ready to fortify your love life, begin with this romance-rejuvenation program:

There is every reason to expect that your romance rating can soar to new heights. An extra dose of ardor and affection can heal a hundred hurts and spark new hope for two worn-out lovers. Reviving romance puts you back in touch with each other's best qualities — and reminds you why you fell in love in the first place.

Take each other to new places in your relationship. Use these suggestions to make your marriage better than you ever thought it could ever be!

It might seem foreign and odd at first, but give it a chance! We're willing to bet that you will find out that there is a way to bring back that feeling you had when you were newlyweds!

Remember back to your wedding day, and feel that way again – every day of your lives together as man and wife!

The following websites were referenced in researching this book:

www.dummies.com
www.womantodaymagazine.com
www.sexsmart.com
www.romancewiz.com
www.about.com