

Keep Fun in Relationships



by Matthew McGahran, MSW

Valentine's Day is February 14. It is a day for exchanging presents, like chocolate, flowers or jewelry or to go out to dinner with your partner. It is a time of romance. If romance is lacking in your relationship, read on for some Valentine's Day tips.

Most Marriage and Couples Counselors, like me, will insist that communication and intimacy are the glue that holds couples together. While it is true that good communication and intimacy help couples overcome many problems, making time for fun keeps a relationship, well, fun.

People are not attracted to another person because they think he might be good at communication or she might be good at solving problems. These are admirable skills, but the main reason for the initial attraction to another person is that we think the other person is nice to have around; they are fun!

When we are having fun we are spontaneous and living in the moment. Problems and difficulties are hard pressed to find a way in. Fun is a reprieve from the mundane. It is a chance to experience ourselves, and our partners, as we really are, truly fun people.

Why Not?

Time. The main reason people give for not having any fun is time. "I don't have time for fun." This is truly an unfortunate statement. We have time for so many things in our lives that do nothing to improve the quality of our relationships; we watch too much TV, we argue, we have long commutes to and from work, we work overtime, we put work ahead of our relationships. In short, we don't make the time for fun.

If you fit in this category, *make the time!* Fun experiences will make the rest of your time more enjoyable and increase the quality of your relationship.

Fun is for kids. You're grown-up, you're responsible so put away the toys and get back to work! The saying "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" still holds true. You certainly can spend all your time working and your free time watching TV, but is that fun? At what point in our lives did we say that we have to stop having fun and we must concentrate on life. Even physical activities, which have a great potential to be fun, are often "working out". Exercise has a goal. When we were kids we did physical things for the sake of doing something physical. There was no goal. Kids are not concerned with their maximum heart rate or increasing their metabolism. Change your physical routine into a fun "play out" and see how it improves your life.

Conflict. Many couples will not attempt fun activities together because they are afraid of getting into a fight

about, or during the activity. When you make the time for fun, you have to be committed to having that time only for fun. You can argue all you want, later, after the fun. To avoid argument about what to do for fun, negotiate the fun activity and stick to the agreement. If someone says something disagreeable during the activity, suppress your urge to fight back and ignore the comment or state that you'd like to talk about it later, *then drop it.* Keep your fun time sacred.

What do you and your partner do for fun?

Pick a night and make that your "date night" for the rest of your life. During this date, talk about anything but kids, finances, and work. Everyone says, "What's left to talk about? You'll be amazed that there are a lot of other things to talk about. In order to bring that "spark" back you need to rediscover yourselves as a couple.

To decide what to do write down 5 or 10 of your favorite activities on index cards and either you or your partner pick from the pile of cards. You must both agree beforehand to do whatever you pick.

Remember you are doing these activities for fun. There are no strings attached and no other goal to accomplish, except to have fun!

Here are some ideas on what you can do to make your partners' Valentine's Day Special:

- Send them a Valentine's card, expressing your feelings.
- Cook them breakfast in bed, with the food displayed nicely on a tray and a note telling them how much they mean to you. Pamper and let them relax all morning if you're both not working.
- Surprise your partner by cooking them dinner (especially if you normally don't cook). You can always buy prepared foods if you are not too confident to launch into the kitchen. Have the table set with candles and appropriate background music. Dress for the occasion.
- With a family, it's a special day if you work with your kids in making that special dinner or day for your partner. Take them on a picnic to a romantic location e.g. with a view of the city lights, or stars, or the water. Have the wine, food and decorations all prepared to take with you.
- Take them out to a restaurant - most have specials on Valentine's Day. Wine and dine them at your expense. It might be a good idea to book the restaurant well in advance.

- Take them to a place they love, or to do something that they have always wanted to do.
- Tell your partner to be ready to go out for dinner at a set time. Go and hit the town in style. Maybe you could try and recreate your first date.
- Organize a weekend away - Mystery Destination, Romantic hideaways. Even a simple outdoor camping/tramping trip may be the ticket. A new location can help make you spend time focusing on each other rather than on the routines of everyday life.
- Flowers are always a good present for your partner on Valentine's Day. Roses are a traditional expression of love. If it is perfect happiness you feel, then pink roses are the color for you. If your sweetheart is a charming & innocent then white roses are more suitable. Red roses are for the one you



love and desire. Interesting fact: 90% of flowers purchased for Valentine's Day are by men. However this doesn't mean that you women out there shouldn't send flowers to your man. A single red rose is often a popular choice.

- Chocolates!!! It's a well-known fact that most women **love** chocolate! Buy her a box of her most favorite brand of chocolates. Accompany it perhaps with an evening of romantic videos e.g. "Ghost", "The Princess Bride", "Romeo & Juliet", "Titanic", "City of Angels", "While you were Sleeping", to name a few.

