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## Dating Tips: 9 Ways to Make Your Relationship Last

Apply these simple tips and watch your relationship flourish in good times and bad

By Stacy D. Phillips

As a divorce attorney, I pride myself on having saved some marriages during my 25 years in practice. I would very much like to see people work things out, if they can. I have come to realize that if couples try one or more of the following 9 suggestions, they may be able to keep their relationship from hitting the rocks in the first place.

**1. Delineate “yours,” “mine,” and “ours.”** If you have finances that should be placed in each of these three categories (for example, you have an inheritance and he has a savings account he accumulated before the marriage, and you also have a checking account to which you both contribute), have an upfront conversation about those assets and what belongs to whom. Moreover, talk about your time away from “together” activities, like he wants to bowl with the guys on Tuesday nights and you want to attend your yoga class on Wednesday. Respect these important delineations. Doing so will make the relationship stronger.

**2. Carve out time to be together.** Sure, you’re busy working and attending meetings, but how important are those things if your relationship falls apart? Make time to do things together that you both enjoy. This could be anything from grocery shopping to taking in a movie. Take regular vacations together -- at least a couple of long weekends and, better yet, a couple of long vacations (more than a weekend jaunt). Commit to a weekly date night and make it as unbreakable as that all-important staff meeting at work.

**3. Take care of yourself.** Spend time every day on your appearance and your physical well-being. Work out regularly, eat healthy, and stay fit. Not only will your partner like looking at you, but you’ll feel better about yourself.

**4. Make sure communication goes both ways.** Many relationships fail because of misunderstandings. Effective communication skills are necessary if your relationship is going to survive. If there is a hint or vibe that your partner is disconnected or you are unhappy about something, do not ignore those signals or feelings. Approach your mate and suggest an open discussion. You may be frustrated, angry, or hurt and so may he or she, but always stay calm and reasonable. Your goal should be to resolve differences, and the only viable way of doing so is through open and direct communication.



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**5. Criticize gently.** Don't judge too harshly. If you criticize, do so in the same way you would want others to criticize you. Be kind and considerate.

**6. Never stop courting one another.** Gifts, compliments, and a loving embrace go a long way, especially when they are a surprise. Send unexpected greeting cards, slap a Post-It note where you know your mate will find it, keep those flowers coming in a "just because" way. Treat your partner with the same courtesies you did when you were dating. A terrific mind set is to pretend you are trying to win your partner all over again.

**7. Keep the flame burning.** Keep your romance alive despite the chaos and craziness life can present from living in the midst of sheer reality. Resolve to offer up romantic suggestions for your partner's pleasure, even if only occasionally, like cooking her favorite meal when you know she's had an impossible day, or entice him into a bubble bath with you just for the fun of it. Little gestures like these from time to time can ensure that the flame you once had burns forever.

**8. Spell out your terms of endearment.** Call out the expectations for one another in the form of the "terms" of your relationship together. Put them in a contract, if you like. This contract will simply clarify and document those needs and wants that mean a lot to you. For example, though he typically runs late, your agreement might specify those times when he agrees not to be late; she may agree to keep her spending at a certain limit, though she typically has little restraint as she traipses through the mall. Discussing these boundaries, as well as your needs and wants, can prevent either of you from stepping over the line and causing irritation. It is often the disappointments (needs and wants, gone unexpressed) that bring down a relationship.

**9. Renegotiate your contract.** Your relationship will evolve, and your needs and wants will change right along with it. Once a year, it's a good idea to review, update, or revise your contract with each other -- whether it is verbal or written. Be mindful, however, not to allow such a "contract" to ruin your relationship.

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