Ask an Expert: How to Combat 13 Barriers to Relationship Fun

Boring, drab, lifeless, stale, dull, tedious. These are probably not the words you hope to use to describe your relationships. How about well planned, frugal, precise, productive, serious, busy? Though these can be characteristics of a strong, healthy relationship, they are not likely those things that make a relationship seem appealing. What made your relationship so attractive in the beginning? What is it about your partner that made you want to be with him or her? In the beginning, no matter what the “spark” in your relationship was, it was so enjoyable you that both wanted to continue being together. Have your blissful days of being in love continued? Unfortunately strong, healthy, long-lasting marriages don’t just happen. We have to be intentional about our marriages, and research tells us that playing together helps us connect and feel more positive toward each other. Keeping the spark alive can be the most enjoyable work you and your partner will ever do. Make time to play and have fun; it is good for you and your relationship.

Consider the following barriers that stop couples from playing together and also ideas on how to combat them.

* Lack of energy, unhealthy living habits. Make a plan to eat right and participate in physical activities. Help each other stick to the plan.

* “Some day” syndrome. Schedule it and leave reminders for yourself.

* Fear of looking silly. Let your partner know your fears and trust him or her to help you overcome them. Do fun things together that you feel comfortable with.

* Differing ideas of fun. Find out why your partner enjoys his or her hobbies so much by asking questions and trying it yourself. Be open minded. Compromise.

* Serious disposition. Laugh at yourself. Just try playing and see what happens.

* Resentment. Remind yourself of how you used to feel toward each other by doing things you used to enjoy together, looking at old photos or talking about feelings.

* Loss of hope in the relationship. Remind yourself of happier times by displaying happy photos, reminiscing, looking at memorabilia, etc.

* Too competitive. Play a new game. Don’t keep score. Work together to complete a task.

* Lack of money. Find fun things to do together that are free. Or, save for a special occasion.

* Other priorities. Talk together about what you feel is important to make an enjoyable relationship.

* View it as a waste of time. Consider play as a way to strengthen your relationship, because it is!

* No role model. Talk to or read about other couples that have had successful relationships. Watch children play; they are the experts.

* Feel it is unnecessary. Just try it and see how much more enjoyable your relationship can be.

Now that you have considered some of the barriers to play in your relationship, take action and make a plan to do something fun.

Based on ideas from The Power of Play in Relationships Manual (Braff & Schwarz, 2004) and Your Time Starved Marriage (Parrott & Parrott, 2006).

For additional ideas, see this fact sheet.

By: Naomi Brower, Utah State University Extension professor, naomi.brower@usu.edu, 801-399-8206, and Clarissa Barnhill, USU Extension intern