

Ask an Expert – Tips to Keep the Spark in Your Relationship All Year

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Though it's February and relationships are on people's minds, it doesn't have to be Valentine's Day to consider ways to strengthen your relationship with your partner. Consider these six tips to help keep the spark going all year.

1. Find and make time to spend one-on-one with your partner. Put distractions (i.e. cell phones) aside, and enjoy the time conversing with each other. Go on your favorite dates, and mix in activities that can help you explore new interests.

2. Share acts of love and kindness. Leave notes under the pillow or in a lunch box. Drop by each other's work with a treat. Come home with a fun surprise, or take your partner on a quick, unplanned outing for a drink or ice cream.

3. Think before you speak. When it comes to arguments and differences of opinions, take a step back and reflect on how important the point of argument is. Is it really worth putting your foot down? Is there room for compromise?

4. When discussing matters, be a good listener. Don't interrupt — wait for your turn to speak. When speaking, repeat what you heard to summarize what you think you heard. Then use "I" statements by saying "I feel [*what feeling?*] when [*this happens*] because [*why you feel that way*]. Even better is when you can follow up with a request. For example, "**I feel** frustrated **when** you leave for the gym before you help clean the kitchen, **because** I am left to do all the work on my own and it takes the rest of my

evening. **Next time can you please** help me quickly after we are done eating?"

5. Make each other smile. Laughter is the best medicine. Capitalize on inside jokes to make special moments of connection. Replay the inside jokes occasionally during conversations, or in texts or emails. This can help keep you both smiling.

6. Keep traditions alive, and consider creating new ones. Remember anniversaries and special events with a date, gift or note. Consider re-creating your favorite activities each year.

If you are looking for more ways to strengthen your relationship, visit relationships.usu.edu.

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