

RESTORING ROMANCE

In the beginning of a relationship, both partners are leading separate lives and have much to share with each other. Over time, couples often give up independent activities. They may let go of friends and interests and start “living for” the other. When people don’t have some time apart, a marriage loses its mystery. The opposite can also occur: both people may go separate ways, and when things are bad, their differences become glaring. In addition to the natural forces that can dull relationships, resentments will choke the very life out of anything that is left. But love does not have to die. There are many things couples can do to rekindle fading embers:¹

1. Heal the resentments that are choking your relationship. Take action to reclaim your power and repeatedly sympathize with any distress your partner feels as a result. When you can’t resolve conflicts on your own, find help!
2. Get a life. Be sure to have interests or hobbies separate from your partner. Make yourself happy and share what you’ve been doing. Ask yourself, “What would I do if I didn’t spend so much time worrying about my partner?”
3. Make separate lists of fun and exciting activities each person would like to do with the other. This can include simple activities such as showering together, massage, walks, or dancing. Do one activity a week, even if you are feeling “lazy.”
4. Make separate “caring lists” of things your partner does or used to do that make you feel loved. Add any behaviors that you’ve always wanted but have never had, such as cards, flowers, little presents, hugs, opening car doors, compliments, holding hands, nonsexual touches, and good-bye kisses. Romantic gestures are particularly important for helping caregivers find relief from constantly attending to others. The resulting improvement in mood will make romance well worth the effort.
5. Perform caring behaviors regularly. They are gifts. Give them in spite of how you feel about your partner and regardless of the caring that is being shown to you.
6. Train your partner to be romantic by showing appreciation of caring and by giving gentle reminders: “Don’t forget my kiss good-bye.” “You don’t know what a relief it was going out tonight.” Even if you have to ask for it, a caring behavior counts. The best way to love someone is to help him or her to be successful in loving you.
7. Go on weekend getaways to make romantic connections without distractions. Just planning and looking forward to an event can reenergize relationships.
8. Make changes that will give your union the balance it needs. Decide if you need more separation (number 2) or more togetherness (numbers 3–7).
9. Find a cause that interests you separately or as a couple. Extending the energy in your relationship beyond yourselves creates “soul mates.” Political groups, charities, and religious organizations offer “transcendent” opportunities.
10. Don’t compare your relationship to movies and dime store romances. Mature love is more about being comfortable with and enjoying someone than about an all-consuming obsession. Relationships need some common ground, but not a lot. You may have more to share than you realize.

¹ Several of these strategies are adapted from *Getting the Love You Want* by Harville Hendrix (Henry Holt, 1988).