

# **Become a Better Partner by Using Assertive Statements**

A man and a woman are sitting on a couch, looking at each other and smiling. The woman is on the left, wearing a light-colored sweater, and the man is on the right, wearing a light blue shirt. They are both resting their heads on their hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a house and trees.

**BECOME  
A BETTER  
PARTNER**

**LIVE WELL UTAH**

*Happy Family Friday! This week learn how to approach conflict in a relationship or marriage.*

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It can be hard to approach your partner when there is conflict in a relationship or marriage. Oftentimes, humans err in three ways when there is something difficult to discuss: 1) We become too aggressive, saying things in a harsh tone that we will later regret; 2) We are not assertive enough, shutting down quickly when trying to explain our point of view; or 3) We avoid confrontation entirely because we don't like conflict or feel it won't help. Fall within one of these three categories? Try using assertive statements the next time an issue arises.

## **Assertive Statements**

Assertive statements are loving ways to express a thought, feeling or desire that could create tension or conflict within a relationship; each statement is finished with something you'd like to see changed, such as:

1. What I would like from you in our relationship is...
2. What I could do for you that would help our relationship is...
3. What I would like for you to do more in our relationship is...
4. What I would like for us to do differently is...

If you'd like to create your own assertive statements, make sure they identify what you are feeling in the situation and are not accusatory to your partner. Using "I" based assertive statements rather than accusatory "you" statements allows you to acknowledge your feelings in a non-threatening and inoffensive way. This act of less accusation will lead to a more conducive environment for problem solving, which is vital in building happy, healthy relationships.

## Learn more

*Want to learn more tips for your relationships? Healthy Relationships Utah offers FREE Couple LINKS courses that teach concepts like assertive statements and many others. This research-based course is great for couples who want to build happy relationships or repair distressed ones. To learn more, visit [healthyrelationshipsutah.org](http://healthyrelationshipsutah.org).*

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This article was written by Megan Hargraves, Media Specialist with Healthy Relationships Utah, [megan.hargraves@usu.edu](mailto:megan.hargraves@usu.edu).

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## Taking a Minute to Win Your Relationship

LIVE WELL UTAH

TAKING A MINUTE  
*to win at*

YOUR  
RELATIONSHIP

*With these relationship tips, you and your partner will both come out winners!*

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## Win-Win Situation

Experiences in my life have led me to appreciate the moments I have with those I love. I'm especially grateful for my husband who I had to search long and hard for. I can't say that I don't EVER take him for granted, but I know how hard it was for me to find him; and I want to make sure that he's around for a long time. So, besides encouraging him to replace fast food with veggies and to exercise with me, I also try to keep the love alive by doing little things that are easy and don't take much time but that let him know how much he means to me. I thought I'd share a few of the ideas I've tried (or plan on trying) to help keep the relationship spark.

- Take silly pictures of each other and laugh together.
- When he/she is sharing something with you, give him/her your undivided attention (I admit I need to work on this!).
- Give a silly gift at an unexpected time.
- Flirt with each other.
- Leave a sticky note or note card somewhere that tells about how much you love and appreciate your partner.
- Share one thing you are thankful for about each other before going to bed each night.
- On a trip somewhere in the car, kiss at every red light or stop sign.
- Stop whatever you are doing to enjoy the sunset together.
- Send a text or email just to say hi.
- Surprise him/her with a favorite treat.

What are the small things you do to keep the spark in your relationship? What new idea are you willing to try this week? Check out some other ideas on how to make every moment you have together count at

[http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Marriage&Relationships\\_2013-01pr.pdf](http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Marriage&Relationships_2013-01pr.pdf).

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This article was written by Naomi Brower, Weber County Director/Extension Associate, Weber County

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## Upcoming Event: Marriage Survival Course!



*Can Your Marriage Survive?*

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## It's a Jungle Out There!

Married, engaged, and seriously dating couples are invited to participate in a five-week course that will help couples enrich their relationship and build a healthier marriage.



Topics that will be covered in the classes include:  
**increasing commitment, communication skills, financial harmony, strengthening your relationship, and protecting your marriage.**

Come join us for a fun evening while learning about healthy relationships. **A light dinner will be served.** Class size is limited.

## **Register here!**

Tuesdays, March 1-29

6:30-8:30 p.m.

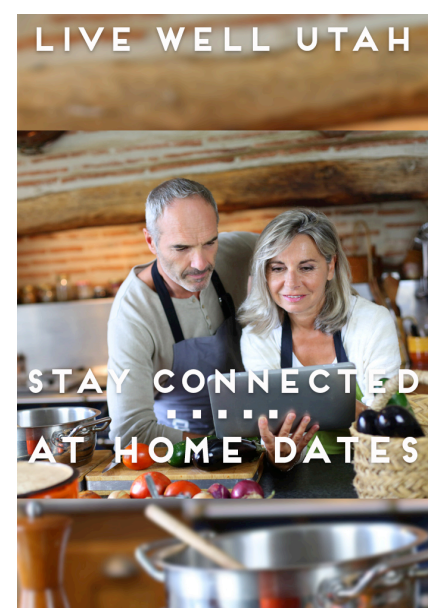
Wetland Discovery Point, Kaysville

\$20 Per Couple for series, includes light Dinner

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## **Easy Dates to do AT HOME!**



*You don't have to go out on the town to have a fun date!*



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# Couples Night IN

Finding time alone as a couple is an important aspect of maintaining a strong and healthy relationship.

Couples with children often struggle to have the time or energy to reconnect as often as they would like.

While it can be a challenge to find the time and resources to go “out” on a date, there are many fun activities couples can do at home to reconnect, especially after the kids are asleep. In order to make “at home” dates successful, follow these three tips:

**1. Keep it simple.** Going on a date with your sweetheart is about connecting with each other. Activities do not need to be elaborate or require a lot of time or energy. Even 20 minutes of uninterrupted quality time can boost a relationship.

**2. Make a plan.** Because you are staying at home, it will be easier to just fall into the normal routine rather than to have a date night, so plan what you will be doing and when. This will also help you to know what you might need to do or buy to be ready for your date. Be sure to take turns choosing the activity (complaints on either side can spoil the fun).

**3. Focus on each other.** Once again, because you are at home, it is often easy to get distracted by housework, electronics, etc. Commit to focus only on your spouse and the activity you are doing together for the timeframe you have planned.

Where possible, make an effort to connect through conversation throughout your date, especially about personal thoughts and feelings (not just about the kids).

Ideas for “at home” date nights:

- 1. Star gaze.** Set up a blanket in the backyard and enjoy looking at the stars. For bonus points, get a star map and try to identify constellations.
- 2. Walk in your partner's shoes for an evening.** Swap your normal "duties" for the night to try to understand life from your partner's perspective. After the kids go to bed, discuss your experience.
- 3. Look through old photo albums** and reminisce together. If you feel really energetic, make it a time to put loose photos into albums or delete out-of-focus and duplicate digital files.
- 4. Have a fondue party.** Dip your favorite veggies, fruits or snack foods in cheese or chocolate. Yum!
- 5. Curl up for an evening of reading.** Find a book you both enjoy and take turns reading to each other.
- 6. Go dancing.** Check out a dance instruction video or find one online and turn your living room into a ballroom.
- 7. Camp in your own backyard.** Set up a tent, snuggle and tell ghost stories. If you have a fire pit, light a fire and roast marshmallows and make s'mores. If not, improvise using a gas stove, barbeque or microwave.
- 8. Go gourmet.** Sample a few types of cheese you haven't tried before with crackers, bread or fruit and critique each one.
- 9. Cozy up on a blanket** in front of a fireplace and have a picnic or treat. No fireplace? You can improvise with a bunch of candles grouped together.
- 10. Watch a classic romantic movie or funny videos** on YouTube. Make a fluffy bed out of pillows and cushions on the floor for a fun change.
- 11. Play board games or card games.** For a fun twist, decide on a service or treat that the winner will receive.
- 12. Get sweet.** Have an ice cream sundae bar, experiment with creating your own smoothie recipes or have a chocolate tasting night.
- 13. Have an at-home spa night.** Light some candles and give each other a massage, take a bubble bath or if you are feeling adventurous, treat each other to a pedicure or facial.

**14. Create a dream board of pictures** or a list of places you want to visit or fun things you would like to do together in the future. Make a plan to make one of them happen.

**15. Get active.** Try a new exercise video together or take a stroll around the outside of the house to get some fresh air.

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This article was written by Naomi Brower, Extension Associate Professor

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## 5 Quick Tips for Managing Money as a Couple



*These 5 tips will help you manage money as a team!*

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# The Cost That Money Can Have

Successful couples have learned to blend their money styles by being in harmony with the way they build a budget and spend money. So how do they do it?

Everyone has a money style. Many people love to save, others enjoy spending and unfortunately some just don't want to be bothered with thinking about money, and they are the avoiders.

Often spouses are opposite in their habits, which can work well; but unless they can discuss it and make a successful plan, it can lead to arguments and dissatisfaction in the relationship.

It may have been learned from parents or developed later in life, but **everyone values money differently** and has a preferred style for handling it. No style is right or wrong, but how it is handled is critically important.

Some regard money as a security and have a desire to save and protect it. Some enjoy spending money because it makes them feel good, and still some don't want to even open an envelope that might have a bill inside.

**Unless you understand how your partner values money, it can cause frustration in a relationship.**

When a couple fails to communicate about how each person values money and there is not a financial plan, arguments often arise. **Many unhappy marriages and divorces are a direct result of financial issues.**

A strong relationship will put the value of money into what makes family members happy and content. Money will be used for meeting goals and planning ahead for the future. When you can build a financial plan, you will have the freedom to work on areas of need for your family.

Consider these tips for building a financial plan:

- 1. Discuss how you value money and what is important** (saving, spending or not discussing it). Visit Olivia Mellan's website if unfamiliar with money styles. Take the quiz at <https://www.moneyharmony.com/moneyharmony-quiz>.
- 2. Discuss your family goals for this year**, the next five years and then for future needs and retirement.
- 3. Make a financial plan (a budget)** where you can set aside money to save and money for charity. If things are tight, start where you can. Most financial planners will encourage you to set aside 10 percent for each of these; however, you can begin with less. Even a little can make a difference because it sets a precedence.
- 4. Set up a plan for your family needs** and wants and review it monthly.
- 5. Be sure to set aside weekly activity nights for the two of you.** Spending quality time together can help you discuss your financial plans in a more direct and positive way.

Couples with strong relationships have developed money management skills that work for them. For example, they set aside time each month to go over finances, talk about how they value money and set goals.

Generally one of the individuals will be the money manager; however, both should discuss and look at the plans each month. Both partners must be happy with the spending arrangement.

Understanding the value each person places on money helps build respect in a relationship. Both partners should have input about where the money goes.

Relationships are fragile, and money is a major issue. It doesn't matter how much or how little you have, but how you work as a team to plan and be content with your financial

decisions.

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This article was written by Carolyn Washburn, Utah State University Extension family and consumer sciences professor

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# 10 Things You Should Do Before Saying “I Do”



*Consider these tips to help you have a successful relationship and marriage!*

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## Creating a Happily Ever After

Being in love is exciting and wonderful, and for some people it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of romance. Many people spend more time planning for a wedding than they spend

planning for a marriage. Before deciding to tie the knot, consider these tips to help create a more happily ever after.

**1. Ask: Am I ready?** The happiest relationships are built on a foundation of two happy and healthy people who are ready to take on the challenges of a new life together. Those who are ready to be in a long-term relationship have dealt with their own personal challenges and issues and are not looking for someone to make them happy or to “fix” them in some way (or vice versa).

**2. Take time.** In order to really get to know someone, it takes talking (mutual self-disclosure) + being together (in a variety of situations) + time (at least 90 days) (Van Epp, 2007). Because we are usually on our best behavior when we first meet and it takes time for patterns of behavior to emerge, this is a process that can't be rushed, even if you spend a lot of time together.

**3. Be extra cautious in long-distance relationships.** While online dating is a common way to meet people, steer clear of commitment without spending a lot of time in person in many different situations. It is easier to show only our best selves in long-distance relationships.

**4. Play detective.** Ask deep and meaningful questions that will help you know if you are compatible with the person you are dating. For example, check out these 10 Questions to Ask Before Saying I Do. To make sure we aren't biased about how we are viewing the person we are dating, it may also be helpful to think about how others might view him or her, or even ask others about their opinions and listen for warning signs you may have missed.

**5. Start to become part of the family.** Much of who we are was learned from growing up in our family, so we can learn a lot about what someone will be like as a partner and parent from observing, asking questions and spending time with their



family. If there are concerns about a partner's family or negative traits that a partner has learned from his or her family, you may want to think twice before getting too serious. While change is possible, it takes time and effort, and it is much easier to change before getting into a serious relationship.

**6. Watch for personality compatibility.** While we probably won't have everything in common with our partner, happy relationships often have many of these traits in common: emotional temperament, sense of humor, intelligence, energy levels, similar recreation interests and how affection is expressed.

**7. Be aware of each other's values.** Some of the biggest arguments in relationships relate to those things we value most because we have strong feelings and opinions about them. Having similarities in how religious/spiritual you are, having common financial views and goals and having similar views about family life are all major factors in lasting relationship satisfaction.

**8. Watch for daily life compatibility.** While it may not be romantic, the truth is that most of the time we spend with someone in a long-term relationship will be in the everyday routine of life. Consider such things as: Who will earn and manage the money? How will household responsibilities be divided? How will free time be spent? The answers to these questions can be crucial to the happiness of relationships.

**9. Learn conflict resolution skills.** Because we are all different, conflict is inevitable in even the happiest of relationships. When handled in a positive manner, overcoming conflict can strengthen relationships. Having a conflict plan in place can be helpful. Begin by setting the ground rules, such as choosing when and where to deal with conflict and remember to practice good listening and communication skills.

**10. Plan now to keep your relationship strong.** Just like cars, relationships need regular preventative maintenance in order to run smoothly and prevent problems. Research suggests that relationship education (such as attending a class or reading a relationship book together, etc.) can help relationships stay strong. Consider what you will do as a couple to keep your relationship strong.

For more information and class schedules on relationships, visit [HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org](http://HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org).

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This article was written by Naomi Brower, USU Extension associate professor

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## **Date Your Mate // Will You Take The Challenge?**



*When life gets busy, it's easy to get into the routine of dinner and a movie. Here's a reminder that it's fun and easy to add something new and different to your dating scene!*

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## **No More Popcorn!**

Author – Naomi Brower

Your challenge, if you choose to accept it, is to pick one fun date night and make it happen this month. Think outside of the movie theater and add some excitement to your dating life! Here are a few ideas for date nights that I think are pretty fun and inexpensive to get your creativity going:

- Have a romantic picnic. Give your taste buds a new experience as you try new varieties of cheese (yum!) paired with sparkling cider and fresh fruit. For extra fun, add a blindfold and try to guess the type of cheese your sweetheart is feeding you.
- Go on a “vacation” for the night. Pick a destination and then eat food and do activities that would be similar to what you’d do if you were there. Or, attend a travel expo and dream about places you want to go. For extra credit, make a collage of pictures from all of the travel books you pick up and put it somewhere in your house. (Yes, I really have this hanging in my house.)
- Play glow in the dark tennis, volleyball, Frisbee, or golf. You can buy many of these items at local stores for \$20 or less.
- Cultivate your green thumb. Attend a class together at one

of the local USU Extension offices or botanical gardens. Put your new knowledge to work in your yard.

- Look for “the best\_\_\_\_\_” (fill in the blank) in the area. For example, spend time comparing places for creating “the best” echo or places that sell “the best” frozen yogurt (my favorite!).
- Take a hike. Explore a new hiking trail in your area and then enjoy snacks as you take in the view at your final destination.
- Have a fondue party. Melt chocolate or cheese and dip veggies, meat, bread and treats. (Fondue pots are helpful but small crock pots also work well.)
- Go window shopping. Check out the latest electronic gadgets. Get ideas for decorating your home. Try on a new clothing look. Take some goofy photos together. (This is the perfect opportunity to get gift ideas for your sweetheart for future occasions!)
- Have a progressive dinner for two. Go to several different restaurants, enjoying a yummy appetizer at one, your favorite main course at another and the dessert you’ve been craving at the last.
- Take a trip down memory lane. Watch your wedding video or look at your old photo album of when you first met. You might notice something that you missed the first time.
- Attend the Utah State University planned county date nights designed to provide inexpensive and fun dates for couples, while learning relationship tips that will keep your relationship strong.

Not only is playing with your sweetheart fun, but spending time playing as a couple can increase feelings of closeness, improve communication and help couples to unite, which can

help them when overcoming differences and challenges.

For additional inexpensive date night tips, as well as tips, classes and resources on building healthy relationships, see [www.strongermarriage.org](http://www.strongermarriage.org).

What are your favorite fun and inexpensive date night ideas?

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This article was written by Naomi Brower



*Naomi Brower is an Extension Associate Professor for Utah State University. She has a Masters of Family and Human Development from Utah State University. Often called the relationship guru by friends, Naomi is passionate about helping others improve the quality of their lives through creating and strengthening their relationships with others.*

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## References

<http://strongermarriage.org/>

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# Top 10 // Questions to Ask Before Saying “I Do”



*Wedding season is here! Amidst all the planning and excitement, it's important for couples to be sure they know each other well.*

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## Something Borrowed, Something Blue

How many weddings have you been to this summer? They are happening left and right!

Before tying the knot, here are some important questions to consider:

1. Do I get along well with my partner's family?
2. Does my partner have a good conscience?
3. Do I have common interests with my partner?
4. Can I communicate well with my partner about tough topics?
5. Does my partner take time to understand my point of view, even if he/she disagrees with it?
6. How does my partner deal with conflict?
7. How does my partner handle money?
8. Are my family values similar to my partner's?
9. Are my spiritual values and beliefs compatible with my partner's?
10. What are other people's perceptions of my partner?

For more information and class schedules on relationships, visit <http://healthyrelationshipsutah.org/>.

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## References :

[healthyrelationshipsutah.org](http://healthyrelationshipsutah.org)

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# 6 Sweet Tips for a Happy Relationship with your Partner



*When it comes to relationships, it might seem like we should just know how to build a happy one, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to have a reminder of some of the basic tried and true principles that can take all relationships to a happy place. To make your relationship stronger, take the challenge to make each one of these happen regularly.*

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1. **Communicate.** Checking in with each other every day and sharing your joys and frustrations will help you strengthen and maintain your friendship.

- Take 10 minutes today and ask your partner an open-ended question such as his or her current favorite hobby or television show or a favorite vacation memory. Any open-ended question is great as long as you are taking time to reconnect and listen to your partner.

2. **Be positive.** Even on tough days we can make the choice to be positive and to build up and praise others.

- Take time today to share something you appreciate about your sweetheart.

3. **Take time to play.** Having fun together helps us to remember why we chose to be together in the first place and builds our friendship that will help us to be strong, even in tough times.

- Set a date to do something fun together. It doesn't have to elaborate or even cost money. For example, you could play a board game or build a snowman together. If you have kids but no babysitter, choose an activity you can do together at home after the kids are asleep. Consider attending a USU-organized date night—a fun night out without any of the planning! (See the USU calendar for healthy relationship activities in your area.)
- Bonus challenge: Make a list with your spouse of things that sound fun to do together so you can refer back to it in the future.

4. **Build memories and rituals together.** Traditions and rituals add meaning to our lives, create memories and help us appreciate the small moments together.

- Take a moment to consider what traditions (celebrating special occasions, holidays, etc.) or daily rituals (ways to say hello/goodbye, bed time routines, etc.) you have. Is it time to add or change something that can help you get closer as a couple?

**5. Discuss expectations and resolve conflicts when they are small.** Everyone has disagreements but when we communicate with love and respect and discuss frustrations when they are small, we can usually resolve conflicts much more easily than after they build.

- When discussing a frustration with your spouse, use “I” statements. For example, fill in these blanks, “I think...(insert your concern), I feel...(share the emotion you feel because of this), and I want...” (share what you would like to see happen).

**6. Be affectionate.** While we all have different ways we’d prefer to express and receive love, all relationships flourish in an atmosphere of love and affection. We can show that we care in many small ways such as leaving a note, sending a text just to say hi, holding hands and kissing hello and goodbye.

- Strengthen your relationship today by showing affection to your sweetheart in some way.

Take one small step today toward the marriage you would like to have this time next year!

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