7 Tips for a Mindful Marriage

Mindfulness can help you more fully enjoy what matters most—including your spouse! Try these seven tips to be more mindful in your marriage.

We live in a fast-paced world, and if we aren't careful, life can slip by without us fully enjoying the people and things we love most. Being mindful, or maintaining an awareness of your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surroundings, can

help you be more mentally, emotionally and physically present, and more fully enjoy those things and people that matter most. Consider these seven tips for increasing mindfulness in your relationship with your significant other.

1. Practice personal mindfulness.

Practicing personal mindfulness can help create a stronger relationship with your sweetheart. Quieting the excess chatter in your mind will help to steady your emotions and lower your physical and mental stress levels, potentially making you less reactive to your partner’s actions or words. It can also help you to focus on the small, everyday moments with your loved one, such as being fully present when you hug or kiss.

2. Prioritize time with your spouse.

In order for us to connect and be mindful of our partner, we need to have time together. Make your spouse a priority and give him or her your undivided attention, even if it is for 10 minutes every day to check in with them about their day. No TV. No phones. No books. Just each other.

3. Continually learn about each other.

Take time to ask open-ended questions so you can know about what is really going on in their world. The more mindful you are of each other’s hopes, dreams and challenges, the more of a support you can be to each other.

4. Show affection.

Let your partner know that you are mindful of them by showing your love daily through affection. Hold hands, give a lingering full-body hug or a five-second kiss.

5. Play together.

Have fun together and try new things. Show that you are mindful of your partner by trying things that he/she enjoys doing.

6. Express appreciation and compliments.

Show your partner that you are aware of him or her by sharing genuine compliments and words of appreciation daily.

7. Service.

Show your partner that you are mindful of him or her by helping ease their load through small acts of service. Even little things like getting up with the kids, making dinner, or doing a chore you normally don't do can make a huge difference.

Naomi Brower is an Extension Associate Professor in Weber County specializing in helping others improve the quality of their lives through creating and strengthening their relationships. She earned her master's degree in Family and Human Development from Utah State University and she is a Certified Family Life Educator. She enjoys hiking, traveling (especially anywhere green) and playing with her husband and adorable little boy. Contact Naomi at naomi.brower@usu.edu or check out videos and other content at relationships.usu.edu.

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Managing Unmet Expectations in Relationships

LIVE WELL UTAH

MANAGING UNMET EXPECTATIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS

Are unmet expectations causing conflict in your relationship? Read on for four tips to manage this problem and strengthen your relationship.

Expectations are beliefs about the way things will or should be. They come from the family we grew up in, the relationships we have had, and the culture that surrounds us (i.e., family traditions, religious or ethnic backgrounds, media, etc.). While we all have expectations, unmet expectations can lead to conflict, frustration, and relationship dissatisfaction. On

the other hand, learning to manage expectations is one of the keys to healthy relationships. Consider these four tips to managing unmet expectations.

1. Identify your expectations as well as those of your loved one.

Unspoken expectations and expectations that you may not even be conscious of are often at the root of conflict. Take a step back to examine what expectations might exist that you may not have considered before. Consider the common topics of conflict.

2. Be reasonable.

Step back and look at your expectations from another perspective. Is it reasonable for the current situation? Just because you would prefer it or it may have “always been done that way” doesn’t mean that it is the best and most realistic solution for current circumstances.

3. Be clear.

Express your preferences using “I” messages and take time to listen to other’s desires. We may not always agree with their expectations, but validating each other’s perspective can set a positive tone for finding a realistic compromise that is acceptable for everyone.

4. Seek for a win-win solution.

Remember, if the solution is not win-win everyone loses. If a win-win solution does not seem possible, then find a way to equally compromise or take turns compromising. Be sure to get back together after an agreed upon time to evaluate, discuss and make adjustments, if needed.

While unmet expectations create frustration and conflict, following these four tips will provide opportunities to grow closer and build happier and healthier relationships.

Learn more great tips to strengthen your relationships at www.relationships.usu.edu.

This article was written by Naomi Brower. Naomi is an Extension Associate Professor in Weber County specializing in helping others improve the quality of their lives through creating and strengthening their relationships. She earned her master's degree in Family and Human Development from Utah State University and she is a Certified Family Life Educator. She enjoys hiking, traveling (especially anywhere green) and playing with her husband and adorable little boy. Contact Naomi at naomi.brower@usu.edu or check out videos and other content at relationships.usu.edu.

Find more contributor bios here.

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How to Keep Your Relationship Strong

HOW TO KEEP YOUR RELATIONSHIP STRONG

LIVE WELL UTAH

Keep your relationship strong by removing these three blocks, and replacing them with things that will build your relationship.

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4 Reasons Date Nights Matter

LIVE WELL UTAH
4 REASONS
DATE NIGHTS
MATTER

Need an excuse for a date night? We've got four– that is, four ways date nights can strengthen your relationship.

Make Date Night a Priority

Summertime is a great time to build memories as a family, but don't forget to also take time for a one-on-one date with your sweetheart too! While it can be a challenge to make arrangements or take the time to get away together, research has shown that having date nights can strengthen your relationship in the following ways:

1. **Increasing communication.** Time to talk can provide opportunities to reconnect and discover your partner's newest interests and dreams.
2. **Having fun together.** Date nights provide an opportunity to get out of the routine, build happy memories and rekindle the spark that can help sustain couples through the tough times.
3. **Strengthening commitment.** Setting aside time to go on a date demonstrates your commitment to each other and sets an important example to children and others that you value your relationship.
4. **Providing stress relief.** Date nights allow couples to enjoy time together apart from the pressing concerns of ordinary life.

Make Date Night a Success

In order to make the most of your time together, consider the following tips:

- Make an effort to plan your date, and if needed, budget

so you can put money toward nice evenings out. For date ideas, check out 10 Tips for Romance on a Budget.
- Make an effort to look your best by wearing something special for your date (cologne, jewelry, special clothes, etc.).
- Get ready to music that pumps you up! When you're listening to music you enjoy, you'll begin to feel good and radiate positive energy.
- Give compliments. Compliment yourself and your spouse to build self-esteem.
- Make the car ride special. Use the time driving to get to know your partner better and discover their current hopes, dreams and interests.

Join us for a Date Night

Looking for a fun date night? Come to the Take a Hike! Reaching New Heights in Your Marriage Date Night on June 23, where you will explore the great outdoors as you hike together in the beautiful mountains near Salt Lake City. Reach new heights as you participate in additional relationship enhancement activities along the way to the top. Click here for more information.

This Article was written by Naomi Brower, Utah State University Extension professor

For more information, see "The Date Night Opportunity" by Brad Wilcox and Jeff Dew found at http://nationalmarriageproject.org/resources/the-date-night-opportunity/

Three Tips to Win Your Relationship

Watch this video to win your relationship by finding small ways to connect with the person you love.

Sliding vs. Deciding for Better Relationships

LIVE WELL UTAH

SLIDING VS. DECIDING FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP

Find out why it’s important to make clear decisions instead of just going with the flow.

One of the reasons relationships can be difficult is that people don’t make clear decisions together about what they’re doing or where they’re headed. There are times in life when it’s easy to slide, or go with the flow to enjoy life. However, sometimes we need clear decisions that make it easier to follow through.

Sliding vs. deciding means people do best when they make decisions about important things in life rather than sliding through life without thinking carefully about what they want. For example, after coming home from work and the business of the day, instead of sliding into watching TV, decide to plan an activity with your partner or child. Another example would be deciding to save up for a trip or large purchase and setting up a savings plan, rather than just hoping there will eventually be enough money for the trip you’d like to take.

USU Extension – will be teaching *Within Our Reach* curriculum as part of our Healthy Family Fun Nights. One of the core themes of *Within Our Reach* is based on this idea that we do best in life when we make clear decisions, instead of sliding through choices. The course will teach critical life and relationship skills to help create a better environment for your family. Participating families will also learn how to make a healthy, quick, delicious dinner and enjoy it together. We are currently recruiting for a series in Logan, UT that will be held in the evenings on May 16, May 23, May 30, and June 6. Register for the event in Logan here.

Check out our website to find a Healthy Family Fun series near you!

This article was written by Carrie Durward, PhD RD Assistant Professor and Extension Nutrition Specialist

Increase the Joy with Forgiveness

INCREASE JOY WITH FORGIVENESS

LIVE WELL UTAH

So much of our happiness is within our own control. Find out how to increase joy in your marriage or relationship through forgiveness.

Isn't it amazing that the people we are closest to have the ability to offend us the most? One reason for this is that when we love someone, we lower our protective emotional wall so we are more vulnerable to getting hurt. It works the same with the people who love us – none of us are perfect – we have all said or done things that offend those we love the most. It is the way we REACT to offending or being offended that determines the effect on our relationship. It is important to think about how we really want to feel. Do you want to feel anger, resentment, bitterness, pain, and misery or do you want to feel love, peace, joy, and happiness? There are ***two*** responses that will bring about the positive feelings we all want to enjoy – ***forgiving your spouse*** when you are offended***,*** and ***offering a sincere apology*** when you have offended your loved one.

The following five steps can help you in the forgiveness process and will allow you to replace the feelings of bitterness and hurt with positive feelings of love:

1. Take time to calm down before speaking to your spouse. This allows your brain to switch from the "fight or flight" area of the brain to the higher level thinking part of the brain.
2. Talk with your spouse about what happened to offend you. Sometimes you will find it was a misunderstanding or totally unintentional.
3. Recognize you aren't perfect either. Think of the many times your spouse has forgiven you for offenses.
4. Think of at least three memories when your feelings of love were especially strong for your spouse. Whenever you feel negative emotions of anger, hurt etc., think of

these memories.
5. Give yourself time for the hurt feelings to be replaced with feelings of love. It may take some time, but don't give up!

It is also important to learn how to offer a sincere apology. Three crucial steps are:

1. Recognize exactly what you did to offend your spouse.
2. Develop a plan to avoid repeating the same mistake again.
3. Tell your spouse you are sorry.

Making sure you include the first two steps will make the third step more meaningful and effective.

So…think of something you may have done recently to offend your spouse and begin the steps of apologizing – and think of something your spouse has done that offended you and begin the steps of forgiveness. Don't forget the three memories!

Marriage can be hard work when you think about giving and taking, forgiving and asking for forgiveness – but when you are snuggling in the arms of the one you love, it is well worth it!

This article was written by GaeLynn Peterson, Wayne County Director and Extension Assistant Professor, FCS and 4-H Youth

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10 Tips for Romance on a

Budget

10 TIPS FOR ROMANCE ON A BUDGET

LIVE WELL UTAH

You don't have to break the bank to add a little romance back into your relationship. Try these 10 tips to make it happen.

When couples first meet, romantic feelings are usually very strong and partners go out of their way to create romantic experiences together. Over time, it can become challenging to find time, money and energy to create romantic moments together. However, creating romantic moments together does not have to be time consuming or expensive. Consider the following tips to reignite the romance in your relationship.

1. **Candlelight dinner.** Going out for an expensive dinner is a popular way to show your partner that you care, but is often reserved for special occasions because of the cost. Almost any meal (even take-out) can be made special by adding a nice ambiance of candles and soft music. Just be sure to keep the television off and focus instead on having a conversation with your sweetheart. To make the night extra special, dress up in your best clothes to make it feel like you are at a special event.
2. **Express yourself.** Take a moment to reflect on the things you really like or appreciate about your partner but often don't say. Write them a short note and put it some place where it will surprise him or her, like their car's dashboard or tucked inside their tablet case. While handwritten notes are a bit more personal, romantic text messages can also be a nice surprise.
3. **De-stress together.** Forget about life's challenges while watching a movie you both enjoy and giving each other a massage or a pedicure.
4. **Take a stroll.** Going on a walk with you partner can provide a relaxing time to talk, and provide a boost of feel-good endorphins. For extra romance, try going for a walk at sunset.
5. **Get "board."** Board games are a timeless and inexpensive

way of having fun together. To add some extra fun, decide on a prize that the “winner” will get such as a favorite treat or doing a chore for the other person, and be sure to make an effort to flirt with each other while playing.

6. **Catch some culture.** Concerts or plays can make a fun date night but can also be expensive. As an alternative, check out the local newspaper and community websites for local band concerts, school plays and community-hosted events.
7. **Dream together.** Escape from your current financial situation and let your imagination run free as you dream together about your hopes and dreams for the future. Consider creating a dream board or book of ideas and pictures that you can reflect on together at a later time.
8. **Get cozy.** Snuggle up together in a blanket and enjoy the night sky together. For an added bonus, find a place to star gaze where you can also cozy up together in the glow of a small fire.
9. **Take a class together.** Research indicates that couples who take time to learn relationship skills and insights together have stronger and happier relationships. Consider attending a healthy relationship class in your area or reading and discussing a relationship book or article aimed at keeping your relationship strong. Find classes and resources at www.strongermarriage.org.
10. **Expand your experiences.** Attending community date nights can be fun because you can try new experiences and you can have a fun night out without all of the event planning! They also provide opportunities to interact with other couples who are committed to strengthening their relationships. Check out the low-cost date nights coming up this spring across the Wasatch Front found on www.strongermarriage.org under classes and events in Weber County.

This article was written by Naomi Brower, Utah State University Extension professor, naomi.brower@usu.edu, 801-399-8206

7 Ways to Make Media Work for Your Relationship

LIVE WELL UTAH

7 WAYS TO MAKE MEDIA WORK FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Does social media add or detract from your relationship with your partner? Check out these tips on how to use media as a tool to strengthen your relationship.

According to recent statistics, over 97 percent of American adults own a mobile phone, and 67 percent own a smartphone. In addition, the platforms and mediums for connection are seemingly endless (Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, email, Instagram, WhatsApp, IM etc.).

Increased options for instant connection can have positive and negative impacts on relationships. While online resources can help us stay connected to those we love and increase relationship satisfaction, being constantly connected to the world through online platforms can also potentially lead to neglecting our partners, conflict, less relationship and life satisfaction, and affairs.

Consider the following seven ways to use technology to strengthen your relationships.

1. **Checking-in texts.** Take a minute during a break to tell your partner you are thinking of him or her or to send a "kiss."
2. **FaceTime/Skype.** While media cannot replace actual face-to-face time, it is an important tool that can be used to help couples stay connected. This is particularly true for couples who spend extended periods of time physically apart (e.g. military, those who travel for work, etc.).
3. **Facebook Posts.** Facebook can be used to publicly express admiration and appreciation for your partner. Photographs, memes, videos and messages can all be used to express affection.
4. **Instagram.** Instagram can be a great way to share moments and different aspects of your day and life with your

partner. This can be particularly useful for couples who are often physically separated due to work or other circumstances.

5. **Email.** Emails can be a fun way to share possible gift ideas found online, date night or getaway ideas, silly pictures or jokes or just to check in with each other.
6. **Pinterest.** Similar to emails, Pinterest can be used to collect fun date night ideas, funny pictures to share with each other, or to create a dream board for future events or goals.
7. **YouTube and Videos.** Videos can be a fun way to connect with each other if you are watching, discussing and/or laughing about them together.

While using media to express affection and commitment can be a great boost to relationships, in order to prevent misunderstandings or frustration, be sure to also discuss boundaries for technology with your partner (keeping profiles public, being open and honest about technology use and who you are communicating with, having technology-free zones or time while you are together, etc.). By having an open and honest discussion and agreeing on boundaries as a couple, you can better ensure that technology will be a benefit rather than a detriment to your relationship.

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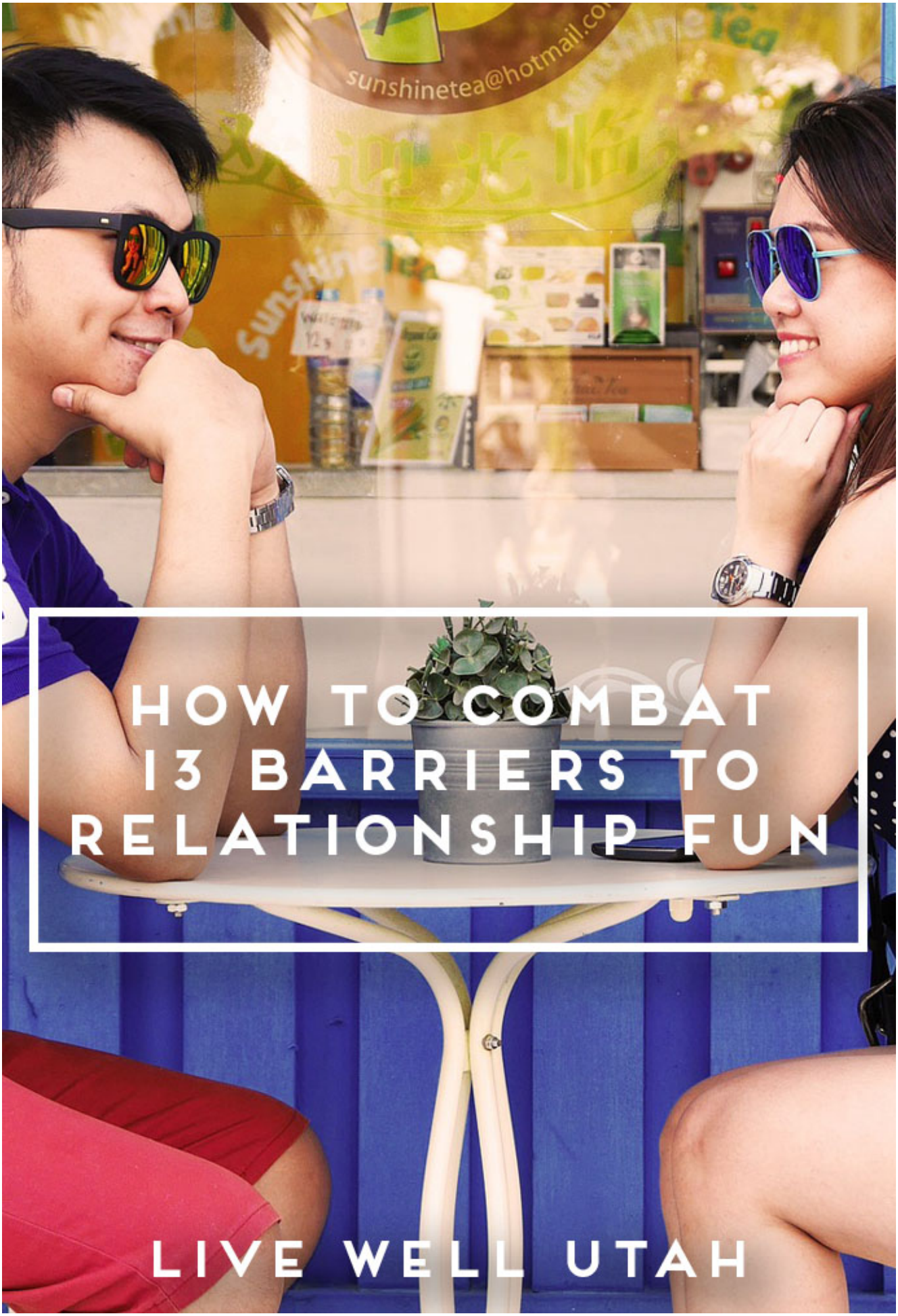
Ask an Expert: How to Combat 13 Barriers to Relationship Fun



HOW TO COMBAT 13 BARRIERS TO RELATIONSHIP FUN

LIVE WELL UTAH

Looking to add some fun back into your relationship? Take a look at these thirteen common barriers to relationship fun, and how to combat them.

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? Unfortunatelystrong, 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.

1. Lack of energy, unhealthy living habits. Make a plan to eat right and participate in physical activities. Help each other stick to the plan.
2. "Some day" syndrome. Schedule it and leave reminders for yourself.
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. Serious disposition. Laugh at yourself. Just try playing and see what happens.
6. 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.
7. Loss of hope in the relationship. Remind yourself of happier times by displaying happy photos, reminiscing, looking at memorabilia, etc.
8. Too competitive. Play a new game. Don’t keep score. Work together to complete a task.
9. Lack of money. Find fun things to do together that are free. Or, save for a special occasion.
10. Other priorities. Talk together about what you feel is important to make an enjoyable relationship.
11. View it as a waste of time. Consider play as a way to strengthen your relationship, because it is!
12. No role model. Talk to or read about other couples that have had successful relationships. Watch children play; they are the experts.
13. 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 the fact sheet:

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/FC_Relationships_2011-04pr.pdf.

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