

Fostering Your Relationships

As a family psychologist for the past 35 years, I have talked with thousands of people who have wanted my help with relationship problems. There are many things that couples, friends and parents can do to strengthen their relationships.

Relationship mistakes

The three biggest relationship mistakes people make are to:

- **Allow friendships to fade.** I am amazed by the number of people I meet who live their lives without a circle of friends. To make matters worse, these folks often don't know what they are missing. All they know is that they are depressed and downhearted and have lost their spirit for living. I often shock these folks by saying to them, "You should be depressed ... you have ignored a very important part of life." I then explain that humans are social creatures. They do not do well when they are alone. People open to friendships enjoy a far richer and more meaningful life.
- **Not nurture the love that brought them together as a couple.** Many people, after marrying or becoming a couple, do little to nurture their love for one another. There seems to be a common misconception that intimate relationships will thrive automatically without any effort.
- **Bicker and argue over the raising of their children.** Parents have a special challenge in keeping their relationship with their spouse alive and well because parents experience a lot of disagreements about the parenting of their children. Burnout and anger can easily result and take their toll on couples with children.

To help avoid these mistakes, try some of these tips for fostering love between partners, parents and friends.

Nurture friendships

- **Be tolerant and patient.** You are not perfect and your friends will not be perfect, so don't give up on a friend during the down times. No relationship can exist very long without apologizing, making up, forgetting and forgiving.
- **Make simple gestures such as smiling, saying hello and calling up a buddy with plans for fun.** They go a long way toward forming meaningful relationships. You can't be passive about developing friendships; you must reach out to others.
- **Find one activity that you love so much you can't wait to do it.** A whole new world of friendships can open up to you when you find an activity you have

a passion for.

Nurture your love as a couple

- **Surprise each other every month** with plans for having fun as a couple.
- **Make every birthday, anniversary and holiday a time to celebrate** your relationship with each other.
- **Become true partners in planning your future together**, because fulfilling your dreams nurtures the love that once brought you together.
- **Let your partner know as often as possible what you admire, respect and love about him**, just like you did when you first fell in love.
- **Encourage each other to grow as individuals.** This growth, in turn, will strengthen your union as a couple.

Keep your love alive while raising children

- **Resolve the differences you have as parents**, either on your own or with professional help. This will help you become a parenting team, and not competitors.
- **Become each other's cheerleader** so the children hear from Dad what is so great about Mom and hear from Mom what is so special about Dad.
- **Keep in mind that there is no better way to live your life than to be a generous, loving person.** When you are generous of heart and loving in spirit, all your relationships will flourish.

By Kenneth N. Condrell, PhD
© 2004-2005 Achieve Solutions