

How to Stay in Love for 50 Years

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- Newsweek magazine had an article recently that said, as an aside, that the research shows that the key to long-term happiness is to have a warm and enduring relationship. I agree.
- What I'm going to say has to do not with the first hot and passionate rush of romance, but what holds the relationship together two years and more into it when the original passion fades (as it must—you'd burn out if it didn't).





- 1.) First—pick the right person.
 - The right person should be someone honest, trustworthy, and not looking for another partner more attractive than you.
 - The right person should be a lot like you—background, religious point of view, values, intelligence.
 - The right person should be caring and want to take care of others.
 - You should have known this person for a while, so there are no nasty surprises.

- This person should be your best friend, the person who is the most fun to be with and do things with.
- Don't be distracted by looks. Good looks go away. Superficial choices lead to superficial relationships. If you love your partner, they will come to be beautiful to you.

- 2.) Second—plan on working on the relationship.
 - Constantly.
 - Forever.
 - You **never** get to assume everything is fine. If there are no discussions that relate to the relationship (they don't have to be directly about the relationship), check periodically to make sure your partner is happy and engaged in the relationship. If not, do something about it.

– It *is* “for better or for worse”—and there will be some worse. There will be times when it will seem as though the love has gone away. But if you stick with it, and work on it hard enough, love comes back.

- Plan on having some arguments.
 - If there aren't any, something is wrong; two people can't be totally of one mind about everything, and maybe one partner is harboring distress and not bringing it out.
 - **Plan on having to compromise in every argument.** Both partners must come out of an argument feeling their needs have been met at least partially.
 - Plan to fight *fair*. Don't say something hurtful just to score points. No hitting below the belt!
 - No hitting, **period**. Ever. No matter how mad you are.

- Attend to the issues at hand in an argument; never bring up other errors your partner may have committed.
- Apologize. There will be a lot to apologize for. Don't be too proud to do it.
- Say you're sorry, say what you will do about what you did or didn't do, and how you will keep it from happening in the future.
- Forgive. Over and over. Everybody does and says things that are stupid or hurtful. Don't hold grudges. Life is too short.
- If there is something you don't agree with or don't like, say so right away—don't let it fester.

- Money.

- This is a BIG source of conflict for many couples. There's almost never enough for what we're told we want.
- Should you blend your money or keep your funds separate? Didn't used to be an issue when only one partner worked. Now—well, maybe, if both partners make an equal amount, you could keep it separate and add up the monthly expenses and split them. Better, split them in proportion to each person's income.

– Separate accounts makes it easier to leave the relationship—which is good or bad, depending on how much you want to stay in it. If your incomes aren't equal, the person with the lower income will feel they are bearing more than their share of the burden.

- I think it's easier if you pool your resources and each partner gets a reasonable allowance of discretionary money, just for them, to spend as they choose.
- Everybody should have some money they can spend any way they like, no matter how foolish it might seem to their partner.
- Neither partner should be able to raid the family resources to buy something for their own gratification without their partner's agreement.
- Discuss all large purchases and make sure you are in agreement about what the *priorities* are.

- Decide who is going to disburse the money, and check with each other about how that's going.
- Pay off your credit cards every month, and don't spend more, no matter how much you want stuff or believe you need it, than you can pay off every month. That will save you a huge amount in interest charges and teach you financial discipline. And more *stuff* won't make you happier.
- In the service of this goal, have only one or at the most two credit cards you use often; lock the others up!

- Divide up the workload equally.
 - There are many things to look at—income-producing work, childcare, housework, cooking, household repairs, making the phone calls, doing the bookwork, and so on. It's hard to balance one kind of work against another, but time spent doing it might be one way, and the emotional burden (like childcare) another.
 - You don't both have to do the same things, but it's really important for neither of you to feel that you are carrying more than your share of the load, or that person will become angry and resentful.

- **This is the big one:**

- Spend time, every day, thinking about what pleases you about your partner. Big things, little things.
- Then tell him/her about them. You can do it in a variety of ways—it doesn't have to be real obvious.
- Tell other people about what you like or admire in your partner.
- ***Don't*** tell other people about what you *don't* like about him/her.
- Tell your partner about what you appreciate that they do.
- Be grateful. For everything, even the small stuff. Think about 3 things you are grateful for every day. Express it.

- Do a lot of touching.
 - Little touches and big touches. Hugging and snuggling, leaning against him/her subtly in public places. Hold hands in the movies or watching TV.
 - A gentle touch on the arm when passing each other while doing stuff around the house/apartment.
 - A little smooch, on the lips or on the cheek, when greeting and separating.
 - Snuggle for a few minutes when you first wake up—snooze in each other's arms, if that's appropriate. Snuggle at bedtime. (Go to bed together.)
 - The contact of skin on skin is one of the most soothing things a human can experience.

- Do a lot of looking at your partner.
 - Especially, look at their eyes, and try to figure out what they are thinking and feeling.
 - Don't stop doing that when you think you have figured out what they think and feel. People change—a lot—from day to day and from month to month and from year to year.
 - The eyes are the window to the soul. Allow yourself to be vulnerable, and be sensitive to the possibility that your partner is not being vulnerable to you.
 - If you can't trust your partner enough to let him/her look into your eyes, you have a problem.

- Talk.

- Talk every day, at breakfast, at lunch if you can eat together, at dinner especially. Be sure that you eat at least one meal a day together no matter what your schedules are like, and **leave the TV off** during the meal! Don't do anything that will keep you from focusing on each other—and on your children, if you have them. No distractors! TV can be something people do to avoid communicating with each other.

- Talk about what you're doing, what you're feeling, what you're thinking. Talk about what's happening at work and/or school.
- Talk about your fears and insecurities.
- Talk about what's making you happy.
- Say little endearments.

- Listen.
 - This seems obvious, but maybe it isn't as much so as it seems.
 - Try to do a little classic Rogerian therapy and see what you learn. Simple agreement, restatement of content, reflection of feeling. Lean toward your partner while you are doing it. Your partner will feel that you really care about what they are experiencing (and you will).

- Laugh.
 - Life is pretty funny, when you get right down to it.
 - Try to make your partner laugh—make jokes, do silly things, try to get him/her to giggle. Laugh together. Laugh at yourselves and at each other. Go to funny movies together. Make puns.
 - Don't take yourself too seriously—be able to stand back and see how funny things are, even those that don't seem funny at first.

- Sex.

- Pretty important if you are married or the equivalent (and maybe in any case).
- Sex is what cements the pair bond. As long as neither of you is being forced or humiliated, enjoy sex as much and as often as you can.
- Something really important: **you don't have to be hot to have fun having sex.** Relax and get into it if your partner wants it (and isn't hurting or humiliating you), even if it's in the middle of the night and you were asleep!

- Very important: Neither partner should *ever* force the other to do something sexually that makes him/her uncomfortable, no matter how exciting it might be to the partner who wants it.
- Play at sex—sex is pretty funny, when you think about it. Early in the relationship it's fairly serious, but that goes by quickly. After that if you don't play at it you stop doing it, and that's the beginning of drifting apart.

- Fidelity.

- The older I get, the more important this has come to seem to me.
- If there is somebody out there who is a better catch than your spouse, and who wants you too, you made the wrong choice to begin with.
- Since “passion” wanes after a few years, a new person, and a new passion, may seem really attractive. After a while it also will wane, and what you will have is someone whose history suggests they will be unfaithful to you too.

- Some people have more than one partner—there’s even a whole movement called “polyamory,” arguing that a person can have a lot of sex/love partners. I haven’t seen it work--it always seems to end up destroying the primary relationship.
- My feeling is that since marriage is a lot of work, when things get tough and you have someone else to go to, you’re tempted to go to them instead of doing the hard work of fixing your marriage.

- Some people will try to build a sexual relationship with you just to stoke their own ego, and then will drop you.
- “I’m just not in love with you anymore” is a huge cop-out. *Do* things to re-ignite the love you felt when you were first in love. There are good ways to do this.
- It’s easy to become really hot for someone else. Resist. Tell yourself you don’t *have* to have everything you want.
- Dropping your partner in order to find a new partner and fall in love again is a sure way to guarantee a sad and lonely old age.

- Children.
 - Well— this one is tricky.
 - Children don't really make you very happy, in general, while you have them—but they are the thing that ultimately makes life most meaningful, and you can love them, and by extension each other, deeply. (And grandchildren are the greatest!)
 - You can really, really, enjoy them sometimes, watching them turn into real people.

- And sometimes they barf on you all night, or scream insults at you, or scare the blazes out of you.
- They almost *always* want to do something different from what you want them to do; it's their job.
- That usually improves a lot after they turn 21.

- Do stuff together.
 - Find things that you both like to do and do them together.
 - Get up together if you possibly can. You will feel much closer if one of you doesn't sleep in while the other gets up, gets breakfast, and gets on with their day without the other. This may be tough if you have different work schedules or different biological clocks, but it really pays off.
 - Go on adventures together. Do something difficult together. Cuss about it together.

- Do stuff for each other.
 - Think about what your partner might like, and do it.
 - Do things that feel good, like massaging lotion into his/her back or hands or feet.
 - Spend time thinking about what might be a little thing that would please him/her.

- Respect your partner for what a truly wonderful treasure they really are to you, and how lucky you are to have them.