



## National Sheriffs' Association Psychological Services Board

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### **20 Tips For A Healthy & Happy Relationship**

- 1. Prioritize quality time:** This means scheduling dates, times to “talk” outside of conflict/issues, fun activities and time when you can be with the person you love outside of any agenda other than just bonding and enjoying each other’s company.
  - 2. Know yourself & continue to be self-aware:** Do you know what triggers you? Do you realize when you are overusing or underusing a strength? Take a free test here to learn more (<https://www.viacharacter.org/>) Are you aware of your “love language?” Take a free test: <https://www.5lovelanguages.com/> Is there something you need to apologize for? What are you holding onto from the past that you need to let go of, in order to move forward in your relationship? Spending time to self-reflect and figure out both what you need and how you can get out of your own way, will help you to get to a better place with yourself and also help foster your relationships with those you love the most.
  - 3. Remember what brought you together:** Remind yourself and each other about what you love about each other, what you appreciate and what brought you together. Reminisce by looking at photographs and talking about the adventures you have had and what you want to do in the future. Find at least one thing to appreciate about your partner/spouse each day and tell them.
  - 4. Create and foster a spiritual connection:** This connection can happen in many ways (i.e., religious practices, spending time in nature, meditation, or talking about the higher purpose of your lives). Connecting and regularly engaging in spiritual practices can reduce your stress, distance you from the stressors of day to day life and bring you closer together.
  - 5. Intentionally work on improving your communication:** We all think we are both good listeners and good communicators; however, we are not always clear, don’t often check the receipt of the message, and sometimes blame others for our poor delivery. Practicing listening to understand instead of replying, being curious and seeking understanding instead of judging, and not assuming your partner can read your mind, are all important strategies to use more intentionally. Share what is going on with you, what you are thinking, what you are feeling and what you need. Then listen with intent to their answers to the same questions. Practice validating (you don’t have to agree or understand), supporting and showing compassion.
  - 6. Forgive:** Everyone makes mistakes, says things they don’t really mean, is irritable, short-tempered and sometimes selfish. While it is healthy to let your partner know how their behavior has affected you, and also ask for what you need, make sure you are not keeping score and holding onto things you will use as weapons later. If there are some things that remain unfinished right now, figure out what you need to do to let it go and do those things. Also, commit moving forward that you will offer each other grace, learn from your mistakes and work on being better each day.
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7. **Create a reset:** When things get tense, you are in an argument or are just irritated with each other, create a way you can both “reset.” This might mean agreeing to disagree and then moving back into positive communication, saying you are sorry and sealing the reset with a kiss, taking a 10-minute break where you can reflect, get control of your emotions and return to the discussion with a more positive communication style, or just agreeing to let something go and finding a more positive focus for your energy. Having one or more agreed upon ways to reset can pull you out of a negative interaction and keep the situation from getting worse.

8. **Say thank you often:** In relationships we often take each other for granted and forget to say “thanks” for the little things. When you practice attending to the small gestures from them (i.e., doing the dishes, putting your laundry away, picking up around the house, cooking dinner, cleaning or organizing a room, buying you a special treat at the store, washing your car or filling it up with gas), you create a habit of looking for what you appreciate and your partner receives regular positive feedback from you. This small practice can make a world of difference and reduce irritation and frustration with each other.

9. **Practice honesty, even when its hard:** Telling the truth in relationships is not always easy. Speaking up when you have made a mistake can be hard, especially if you feel ashamed or vulnerable. Providing your partner with difficult feedback might make you stressed because you worry about their reaction and fear they won't change. Additionally, if you continue to “hold stuff” and not share it, things will end up getting much worse. The first step to being more honest is to get clear on what you want to communicate, how it needs to be communicated (i.e., tone, word choice, location and timing), and what is your ultimate goal. Make a plan from there, including how you can respond with curiosity, grace, compassion and understanding. Realize sometimes the truth is painful and not everyone will respond to what you say in a positive manner. Create space for them to share their perspective, needs, and opinions and then talk about the common ground/goal you can agree on (i.e., we both want a better relationship, neither of us want the other to feel taken for granted, etc.) and continue to build from there.

10. **Take care of your appearance:** When we “date” we tend to show up with our best clothes, personal grooming and attitude; however, once we are in relationships for a while, we tend to let ourselves go and assume our partner loves us no matter what. Take some extra time to take care of both your body and mind, ensuring you intentionally fix yourself up for that person, make efforts to look your best and do things that nurture your own mindset and attitude, so at the end of the day, they don't just get the scraps.

11. **Spend time apart:** Every healthy relationship has “space” in it. Make sure you are nurturing your friendships, engaging in your own hobbies and activities you can do alone or with friends and being intentional about spending some alone time each week. This time allows you to connect with others, gives you the ability to “miss” your partner and provides you some quiet time to reflect, let your mind clear out and allows you to be more intentional about how you show up during the times you share.

12. **Manage the small stuff:** Most issues in relationships start small. It might be something hurtful that goes unsaid, dirty clothes that are constantly left on the floor, dishes not put in the dishwasher, car left on empty, not cleaning up after the dog or never having time to help with homework. All these small things add up over time if they are not addressed. However, if you can be more intentional about taking care of the small things, you will find your relationship is less stressed, more loving and happier. Each day find at least one “small” thing you can do that your partner would appreciate.

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## National Sheriffs' Association Psychological Services Board

**13. Practice kindness:** The people we love the most often get the worst of us. We assume they will forgive, “get over it,” and love us no matter what. Additionally, the longer we are in a relationship, the more we tend to take for granted. Start today to be kinder to those you love. Engage in thoughtful, kind gestures, get them a surprise you know they will love, bring some flowers home to brighten up the house, complete a chore, run an errand and help out with the kids. Regular demonstrations of kindness will smooth out the rough edges, get you both back into a mindset of appreciation and will motivate them to reciprocate.

**14. Rekindle the romance:** What does your partner think is romantic? Flowers, champagne, candles, moonlit walk? What are the things you did when you were dating that brought you close and enhanced your intimacy? Spend time creating romance at least weekly in your relationship and you will find intimacy increases, passion is raised and connection is enhanced.

**15. Be mindful and present:** In this hectic time, we are often multitasking and have a short attention span. When commuting and spending time with your partner (and family) make sure you are present. This means putting your phone down and turning off the TV when you are communicating, not working on your computer, texting and trying to cook dinner all at the same time, and when you are having quality time, minimize all distractions. We are all way too connected to our electronics and have many ways we justify the reasons why. However, the less we are present, the more our partner and family feels we are not listening, we don't care and they are not a priority. Cut the cords, save energy for the people you love and do enough self-care so you can be fully present with them.

**16. Get to know each other:** This might seem strange if you have been in a long-term relationship, but most of us have at least a few things our partners do not know. This could be a funny event in your past, hurtful experience that affects you to this day, a big dream you have for the future, a fear or phobia you have never shared, something you have always wanted to learn. Commit to looking at your partner with fresh eyes, and ask them questions to get to know them at a deeper level. If you can't come up with any here are some books that might help. Many of these are free for Kindle on Amazon.

- The book of questions by Gregory Stock, Ph.D.
- The book of if by Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell
- Consider this: Questions that make you think by Barbara Ann Kipfer
- 365 Questions for couples by Dr. Michael J. Beck, Stanis M. Beck & Seanna Beck
- Questions for couples by Marcus & Ashley Kusi
- A year of us by Alicia Muñoz

**17. Communicate throughout the day:** Our lives are hectic and often full. The texts and emails we send are more of a way to get stuff done and be efficient instead of connecting. Be intentional about sending loving texts, emails, ecards, leave messages on voicemail or notes around the house for your partner to find. Make it clear to them you are on their mind, you love them, appreciate them and want them to have a great day. These small gestures make all the difference and remind them they are the top priority.

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**18. Do regular relationship audits:** Set a time to check in at least monthly about where things are and how things have been going. You can even create a list of questions you ask each other during this check in (see below for examples). This will send the message to your partner that you care, you want to address things when they are small, and that they are a priority. Additionally, setting regular times to check in keeps both of you from holding onto stuff too long, gives you both a dedicated time and space to check in (outside of arguments or irritations) and enables you to celebrate the good regularly.

### Examples of questions:

- When have you felt loved, supported or encouraged by me in the last month?
- What efforts have you seen me make to improve myself or us as a couple in the last month?
- What was the most fun thing we did together this month?
- Was there anything you needed from me that you did not get this month?
- What would you like me to remember or better understand about you?
- Where do you need grace?
- Is there anything you have been holding onto that you would like to share?
- What would you like to do more of next month?

**19. Focus on resolution, not who is right:** Too often during conflict we are focused on being right and winning, and this ends up escalating conflict instead of resolving it. What underlies all conflict is an unmet interpersonal need (i.e., being heard, understood, included, respected, considered, listened to, included, asked, etc.); however, most of the time we never identify or even talk about these needs. Many times, we would rather be right than happy. I encourage you before you talk to your partner about a heated topic (or really any topic where you disagree), reflect for yourself what it is that you really need and what is your ultimate goal of having the conversation/conflict. If you can get away from trying to be right or win, and can share the need you have, ask about their need and focus on a common goal, you will find most conflicts can be resolved in a healthy manner that ends up strengthening your relationship.

**20. Create a shared vision:** Where do you want to be in three months, six years or what do you want retirement to look like? Of course, you may have some different ideas and there is nothing wrong with having personal dreams and goals, but what do you really want as a couple? When is the last time you “dreamed” together, planned for your future, worked on a common goal or pursued something you both really wanted? Dreaming and creating a shared vision will unite you, fan the flames of romance, and bring positive energy and hope to your daily lives, but don’t just talk about it, make a plan, create a vision board, and set regular goals to get you there. Couples that dream together, thrive and stay together, so start dreaming!

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