Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Relationship Revival: Keeping a Mature Relationship in Full Bloom

Over time, long-term relationships can go from exciting, to challenging to a downright yawn. Your once hormone-hyped intimate moments have become bland, haphazard business-like meetings. Attributes you initially adored, now leave you feeling a kind of low-grade annoyance. And you can predict your partner's next move with 99 per cent accuracy.

Of course what makes long-term relationships so great is that you do know your partner inside out. You *can* finish their sentences and know *exactly* what your mate is thinking from a wry smile, a raised eyebrow or a nervous knee-tapping twitch. A new relationship delivers excitement and volatility, while an old one usually offers up comfort and practicality. Both have there advantages, but for many, the "good old days" of a relationship seemed a lot more fun and carefree.

Tending to Your Partner

Maintaining a healthy, dynamic relationship is a little like gardening: even though you planted the seeds of the relationship and got it to grow, you still need to nourish, prune and adjust elements for it to continue to thrive and bloom. Discover the beauty of your long-term relationship and ensure it survives any rough or stormy patch by making the following tips part of your regular maintenance plan.

Share in a new experience. Even though you may be living together, lots of people in mature relationships find themselves gradually drifting apart. Work demands, parenting, caring for aging parents and/or different interests can slowly take over, until you find yourselves living completely separate lives. Share the fun and excitement of learning something new together by scheduling some "we time." Whether it's salsa dancing lessons, a beginner's Italian class for an upcoming vacation or something a bit more daring like braving a rollercoaster, a shared experience can give the two of you something to look forward to, provide you with a goal to collectively work towards and bring new energy to your relationship.

Embrace your mate's "passion." Do you roll your eyes every time your partner heads to the driving range? Do you cringe at your mate's excitement about the opera coming to town? You've probably lived with these 'dreaded passions' for a long time and will for a long while more, so why not surrender yourself to your partner's interests now and then and join in on the action? Shoot a few balls at the driving range, endure the opera from time to time or go and see your partner's favorite band when it's in town. The gesture shows you're interested and actively engaged in your partner's life and also gives your mate the chance to 'show off' their knowledge or ability (which is always a good ego boost).

And if you need another reason to share the fun consider this: research from several studies of happily married couples shows that partners who "play together" are much more likely to "stay together." Who knows, you may even develop a fondness for your partners passion too!

Grow on your own. There's something in that old expression "absence makes the heart grow fonder." While it may seem to contradict the last point, spending time apart now and then to explore other interests or meet up with old friends can give the two of you the space you need to "miss" each other and reflect on what you love about your mate.

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Mind your manners. Ironically the comfort that comes from being together for many years, can also breed bad manners—from not saying "thank-you" for small (and large) actions, to saying rude things to one another during heated arguments, to being consistently late from work without a phone call. Good manners aren't just a superficial formality; they show respect, love and consideration. If you're practicing relationship rudeness make a change now to make life together happier and emotionally healthy.

Engage in some "pillow talk." Choose a daily time when you and your partner are at your most calm and relaxed to share the events of the day with one another. Whether it's after dinner, over coffee in the morning or a half an hour before bedtime, creating a regular 'check-in' ritual can help you process the events of the day, catch up on any important news and ensure that the two of you stay connected.

Keep the relationship on the *write* track. When a relationship is fresh and new, many of us feel compelled to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to let partners know just how much he or she means. Script some passion back into the relationship now by popping a love note into your partner's lunch, pocket or glove compartment. If ties to technology are too strong to overcome, send your affection online through e-mails or text messages. Or why not unleash your inner poet and pen some meaningful verse? The creative effort provides your partner with a window to your feelings and devotion.

Spicing Up a Familiar Sex Life

There's no denying that sex and intimacy go hand-in-hand. But sex can play an even more important role, affecting the success of a relationship and personal happiness levels. Several studies have found that relationships where people frequently engage in sexual activity are more likely to stay together and tend to be happier than those who are less sexually active.

If you've been together for a long time, however, your boudoir, and the activities that go on in it, might seem, well, a little predictable. Take your sex life from a candle flame to a fiery, passionate inferno by:

Sharing. Even though you've been with your partner for years and think you know everything about him or her, there is probably a fantasy that's been stashed away in the back corner of your partner's mind. Allow yourselves permission to talk openly and honestly about these—even if you never actually play them out. Sharing your inner-most sexual secrets can bring new heat to a tepid sex life and can bring you closer together.

Embracing intimacy. Sex in a relationship extends well beyond the physical act alone. Chances are if you're disconnected before you get into the bedroom, it will carry over into your rendezvous. Intersperse intimacy into your day. From a goodbye hug and kiss at the door in the morning, to a hand squeeze over dinner, to a shoulder massage after a tough day on the job—staying in close contact with your partner through intimate gestures can help you both remain physically and emotionally in tune.

Scheduling it in. While it may seem unromantic, blocking off time for sex gives it the priority in your life it deserves and helps ensure weeks don't lapse into months or even years.

Seeking support when there's a problem. Many people are hesitant to discuss sexual matters with a professional out of modesty or embarrassment. The longer you wait, however, the more the issue will negatively impact your relationship and your own sense of well-being. Whether you're having difficulty communicating about your intimate needs or are coping with a physical issue like erectile dysfunction, professional help is available.

From the outside, good relationships often look easy, even effortless. The reality, however, is much different. Like any good gardener, people in great, long-lasting relationships are constantly tending to the relationship, identifying what it needs and responding accordingly. The result is not only a continually blossoming relationship, but a hardy one that can withstand life's rough patches.