

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

Tips for When Relationships Start to Unravel

It's easy to take our frustrations out on our partner, especially when the demands of work and family seem to be pulling us in multiple directions. Whether we are caring for an aging parent, small children or precocious teens or have even just been spending too much time at the workplace the first thing that seems to suffer is our relationship. We may find that we're irritated with or hurt by our partner all too often, or may just have a sense that we're drifting apart.

For millions of couples, this scenario may sound all too familiar. You know that it's important to spend one-on-one quality time together, and that any solid relationship needs nurturing. It's just that arranging some alone time can be a challenge when other responsibilities seem to take priority. The truth is, though, that doing so is essential to a long-term, happy relationship. More often than not, your relationship must take precedence or it will start to fall apart.

Here are some helpful suggestions for making all of it work:

1. If you have children, find a babysitter you can count on, and set up a "retainer" relationship with the sitter so that you commit to an outing with your partner once a week.
2. Explore shared interests, such as visiting a new town or trying a new sport, artistic endeavor or weekend spa.
3. Plan a getaway with your kids to a location that offers child care service.
4. Find different ways to handle conflict that don't include angrily criticizing or blaming your partner. Present the issue as a problem the two of you need to solve together.
5. Don't let work-related stress weigh on your relationship: turn to each other for advice, support and empathy—but know when to leave work at the office and benefit from down time.
6. Look for the positive. Find reasons to compliment your partner or show your appreciation for the little things he or she does.
7. If you aren't getting what you need from your partner, let him or her know. Communicate rather than internalizing your frustrations. Be honest with each other and work together to find solutions.

Taking Problems to the Next Level: Seeking Help

At some point you may want to step back and look at your relationship objectively. Are you where you want to be as a couple? Are you both happy or do you need more from each other and the relationship than you're currently getting? If your efforts to support and accommodate one another aren't working, it's important to recognize that you don't have to cope with the problem alone. With the help of a counselor who specializes in relationship-based counselling, you can work together to overcome the challenges you are experiencing in your relationship, and develop new, healthy strategies for improving it.

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