



# 10 ways to... boost your relationship

*Even if you don't like all the fuss around Valentine's Day, take this opportunity to make some long-term changes in your relationship, to ensure a happier, more loved-up future.  
By Sudeshna Ghosh.*

**1 SHARE AN ACTIVITY**  
According to Devika Singh, psychologist at Dubai Herbal & Treatment Centre (04-3351200), a great way to focus on the future of your relationship is through shared activity. "Research on neurobiology in human relationships shows that engaging in recreational or functional activities together creates a sense of bonding. This is because of oxytocin, the cuddle hormone which is produced through activity and talking," says Devika. Whether it's watching movies, signing up for cookery classes, or going to the gym together, try and establish a routine for doing some things together as a couple. It is key to protect this together time from conflict, however. "If a pressing relationship issue comes up during this time, commit to discussing it at an agreed time in the near future," Devika suggests.

**2 FIND TRUE FORGIVENESS**  
Look inwards and ask yourself, what past hurtful acts of your partner have you truly managed to forgive? You may have been able to look past angry and bitter thoughts, and carry on, but these resentments continue to act as weeds in the relationship. "It does not mean that the relationship will not continue, but it does mean that it will not reach its full potential," says Dr Saliha Afridi, psychologist at Human Relations Institute (04-3658498). "Forgiving may mean that you two have to talk about the painful issues with a third person, or a therapist, or you may have to turn towards spirituality to process the pain and let go of the old wounds on your own."

**3 EXPRESS GRATITUDE**  
All too often, we take the help and support we get from our partners for granted – and forget to say 'thank you'. In the same way you would thank a friend if you went to their home for dinner, you should also thank your partner for cooking you a lovely meal at home – or taking the trash out, or paying bills, or whatever little chore he has done. Showing your partner you appreciate what they do for you is essential for maintaining a happy relationship.

**4 EAT HEALTHY**  
When you eat a healthy balanced diet geared towards physiological wellbeing, you are also feeding your brain. "There are many different mechanisms by which the brain extracts what it needs from the diet, but one of the basics for this process

is gastrointestinal health. Serotonin, the happiness hormone, is found in the gastrointestinal tract," Devika points out. Therefore, by promoting a general sense of wellbeing, you are creating more positivity in your relationships.

**5 MAKE JOINT DECISIONS**  
When you are making big or small decisions – whether it's where you move, what colour your new curtains should be, or where you go on vacation – make a conscious effort to consult your partner, and have an open mind, says Dr Saliha. "By considering their thoughts and feedback before making the decision, you are showing them that you respect them and their input," she says. "This sharing of 'power' is one of the most important things for a relationship to be healthy."

**6 LOOK FOR THE SECRET BUTTON**  
In any marriage, each person needs to be aware of their partner's needs, says life coach Sahar Moussly ([www.lifeinharmony.me](http://www.lifeinharmony.me)). "You might think that you are giving everything to the relationship, but maybe you are not giving what your spouse really needs. The challenge is to find the 'secret button' that works for that person, because if you don't, it can lead to frustration and disappointment, and the relationship will start to feel like too much hard work," she says. The basic human needs are comfort and security; variety (challenges that stimulate); the need to feel important; the need for love and connection; the need to grow and develop; and the need to contribute. Being observant about your partner's behaviour will help you work out what his priorities are. For example, is he feeling angry because his need to feel appreciated is not being met? Once you start understanding what is driving him, you can work at addressing that need, rather than reacting on a superficial level.

**7 DON'T OVERLOOK THE LITTLE THINGS**  
Don't wait for a birthday or Valentine's Day to do something nice for your partner. Make every day special by doing something small for each other or planning little surprises that show you care. This could be anything like a quick phone call to check on him if he isn't feeling well, picking up a muffin from the bakery on the way home, a midday text to say that you are thinking about him, or making his favourite food for dinner. "Too often we think the big things like expensive gifts or fancy vacations will boost our

relationships, but research shows that it is consistent and small acts of kindness on a regular basis that are the most effective," says Dr Saliha.

Devika adds, "When pleasantly surprised, the mind-body system instantly goes into an arousal state. This rush of chemicals can create or enhance healthy feelings of attachment between partners."

**8 FENG-SHUI YOUR HOME**  
This ancient Chinese wisdom can be applied to all spectra of life, including relationships, to help enhance and strengthen them. Feng shui consultant Shivani Adalja ([www.shivaniadalja.com](http://www.shivaniadalja.com)) suggests these simple changes in your home: "Avoid placing water fountains or large fish aquariums in the bedroom, as moving water creates active energy that can create disharmony in the relationship; avoid keeping cactus or thorny plants in the bedroom as that can also lead to conflicts; display fresh flowers in the bedroom as they create a harmonious energy that helps bonding with your partner; and swap art of solo, lonely people for pictures that reflect happiness and togetherness."

**9 KEEP IT FUNNY**  
A sense of humour is critical for getting through common relationship hurdles. If your partner has an annoying habit, using humour when telling him about it, rather than nagging, will make getting your point across that much easier. Equally, playfulness is one of the main casualties of relationships, when you are bogged down by everyday stresses. Consciously seek out ways to find the humour and fun you enjoyed in the early stages of your relationship – there are few things that are as bonding as shared laughter.

**10 WAVE A MAGIC WAND**  
Sit down and make a list of all the changes you would want to see in your relationship, if you had a magic wand to wield. Ask your partner to do the same, but do this separately. The lists should include changes you want in your partner, as well as yourself – so be entirely honest. According to relationship therapist Adriana McBarr ([soulandmindcoaching@gmail.com](mailto:soulandmindcoaching@gmail.com)), "This helps to gauge how each partner sees the relationship at a specific moment in time and how it can be improved. It creates the opportunity to commit to change, so both partners can take responsibility to create the relationship they want to be in." **A**