

29 Ways to Keep Your Relationship Tuned Up

Why do some relationships last forever and others fall apart? Here are some ways you can make your partner feel appreciated again and prevent your relationship from becoming a casualty.

1. Treat your partner as you would your boss, best friend, or best customer.
2. Think about what your partner wants and give it to him or her.
3. Think of ways you can do the unexpected and be thoughtful. Remember how you acted when you wanted to win your partner over.
4. Pay attention to your appearance. Dress nicely; get into shape.
5. Express your thoughts carefully. Being married doesn't give anyone permission to let it all hang out.
6. Spend regular time together alone.
7. Look for ways to compliment your partner.
8. Hug when you say hello and goodbye. It feels good and it makes people feel loved.
9. Learn and practice communication skills. Relating successfully to another person requires a set of skills that can be learned.
10. Be polite. Just because you are married doesn't mean you can forget your manners.
11. When you want something, say please.
12. When your partner does something for you, say thank you.
13. When your partner comes home after a day at work, greet her at the door and say hello. Ask how her day went.
14. When your partner leaves for work in the morning, say goodbye and "I love you" or "Have a good day."
15. When your partner faces a challenge at work during the day, ask how it went when you get home.
16. During your evening meal together, avoid the temptation to watch television or read the paper or mail. Look at your partner and have a conversation.
17. If you want to make plans that affect how your partner will be spending time, check with him first and make sure it's convenient.
18. When you ask your partner a question, make eye contact and listen to the answer.
19. When you disagree with something your partner says, pay attention to your response. Do you express your opinion without putting her down? You can express your opinion assertively rather than aggressively. For

example, you can say, “I have another opinion. I think we should wait until spring to have the walls painted,” rather than, “That’s silly! We should wait until spring.”

20. Pay attention to how much of your side of the conversation is asking questions versus making statements. If you tend to be the dominant one, ask more questions.
21. Ask open-ended questions to encourage your partner to open up and talk. Open-ended questions begin like this:
 - a. Tell me about...
 - b. What do you think of...
 - c. What was it like when...
22. Have you become passive with your partner because that’s the easiest way to avoid conflict? Over time, this is not a good idea. You will inevitably begin to build up feelings of resentment because you are stifling your feelings, thoughts, and opinions. If you think you are choosing passive behavior too often, think about discussing it with your partner and asking him to help you be more assertive.
23. Researchers have found that people whose marriages last the longest have learned to separate from their families of origin (their own parents and siblings) and have appropriate, healthy boundaries. They value and honor their own privacy and separateness as a couple. This means they have regular, appropriate contact with their extended family, but that it is not excessive or stifling. How do you compare?
24. Check your communication with your partner and beware of using “You” messages. These are statements that begin with *you*. For example:

You need to come home by 6:00 tonight.
You shouldn’t do that.
You should call me from the office and tell me when you’ll be home.
Here is what you ought to do.

“You” messages are damaging because they make the other person feel bad or disrespected. It feels like you are talking down to him or her.
25. If you want to demonstrate to your partner that you respect and esteem him or her, try speaking with “I” messages instead. When you start your statement with “I,” you are taking responsibility for the statement. It is less blameful and less negative than the “you” message.

You can use this formula: Your feelings + Describe the behavior + Effect on you. This is how an “I” message sounds: *When I heard that you’d planned a weekend up north, I was confused about why you hadn’t asked me first, so I could be sure to get the time off.* It takes some practice and you have to stop and think about what you are going to say, but your marriage deserves to be handled with care.
26. Make a list of your partner’s positive qualities. Share them with him and tell her why you think each is true.
27. Ask your partner to do the same for you.
28. Respect each other’s private space. Over time, many couples let this slide.

29. As the years pass, many couples begin to feel like they are living in the same house, but have parallel lives. Their paths cross in fewer places. What is the trend in your relationship and what do you want to do about it?