

10 Relationship Tips from a Marriage & Family Therapist

Research-based tips on how to
save and protect the gifts of love
and relationships

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TIP #1

Be More Present



A partner that's present, is responsive. A responsive relationship is a secure relationship.

According to Dr. Sue Johnson, the developer of EFT (Emotion Focused Therapy) you can create a secure relationship by remembering the acronym A.R.E.:

1. **Attuning:** Pay attention to your partner's body language and emotional expressions.
2. **Responding:** Pick up on subtle ways your partner is reaching out for you, and respond.
3. **Engaging:** Get involved with your partner daily by check-in with each other daily.

Learn more in her book: *Hold Me Tight, Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* by Dr. Sue Johnson.

TIP #2

Manage Your Emotions



Learning how to self-soothe is essential to be able to respond, vs. react, to our partner.

Learn how to pay attention to your emotional experience (attune to yourself) and how to cope with intense emotions (stress reducing/coping techniques).

Some ways to achieve this include:

1. Practice mindfulness
2. Practice deep-breathing exercises
3. Practice muscle relaxation exercises

Learn more in this book: *One Minute Mindfulness* by Donald Altman.

TIP #3

Learn to Really Listen



Remember that we have 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason.

Practice listening more than speaking. Listen to understand, not to argue, invalidate, or give advice.

When we find ourselves planning our defense, interrupting the minute we disagree, jumping to giving advice, or telling our partner that he/she "shouldn't feel" a certain way, we're no longer listening. The communication falls apart.

When you really listen you:

1. Show interest
2. Validate the emotions
3. Ask questions

Learn more in this book: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver.

TIP #4

Learn to Communicate Effectively



Good communicators get their needs met.

Learn positive communication skills and use them regularly. Some of these include:

1. Avoid communication blockers like ignoring, sarcasm, insulting, expecting him/her to read your mind, accusing, stating opinion as fact, overgeneralizing, blaming, threatening, and interrupting.
2. Use “I messages” to communicate how you feel, why, and what you need from your partner.
3. Listen reflectively by summarizing your understanding of what your partner shared, even if you don't agree with what was said, to clarify you understood correctly.

TIP #5

Be Best Friends



A strong friendship is the basis of a strong relationship.

Remember when you just started to get to know each other. You were fully present and expressed interest in your partner. Here are some ways to nurture your friendship in the present:

1. Stay curious about each other
2. Express appreciation for each other
3. Assume a positive intention from each other
4. Stay supportive vs. in control or taking over when you're partner is struggling with something.

Learn more in this book: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver.

TIP #6

Practice Healthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries give us freedom in our relationships, making them more mutually fulfilling.

Anger and anxiety are usually signals of boundary crossings. High conflict relationships and disengaged relationships tend to have poor boundaries in common. There are 3 types of boundaries:

1. Diffuse: Not healthy. You feel like a doormat.
2. Rigid: Not healthy. You come off as controlling.
3. Clear: Healthy. There's flexibility for both people to communicate needs, differences, and be themselves. Nobody is making the other one responsible for their feelings.

Learn more in this book: *Boundaries: When To Say Yes, How To Say No To Take Control of Your Life*, by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.



TIP #7

Fight Fair



Conflict is part of every relationship, but in a healthy relationship, it's done honoring your trust and commitment for each other.

Avoid attitudes that hurt your commitment and trust, such as:

1. Only focusing on the negative about your partner
2. Not validating your partner's feelings
3. Treating your partner with disdain
4. Shutting your partner out

Learn more in this book: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver.

TIP #8

Compatible Vision



Shared dreams, goals, vision for the future together is an essential bonding ingredient in any relationship.

Share your dreams with each other and work together towards common goals as well support each others' individual goals.

1. Be transparent with each other about what you want for the future.
2. Find ways you can support each other in reaching these goals and dreams.
3. Be aware if your dreams are not compatible, and explore vs. avoid these differences.

Learn more in this book: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver.

TIP #9

Show each other love daily



A little TLC (tender, love, and care) every day nourishes and grows love.

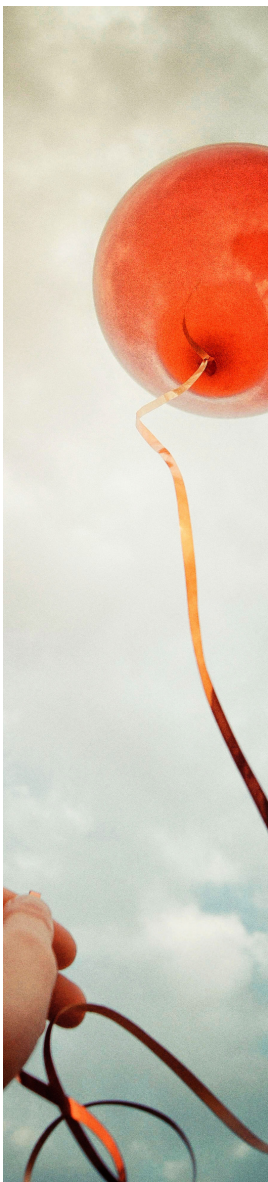
Be intentional about speaking your partner's love language daily. How?:

1. Remember that what fills your love tank isn't always the same as your partner's.
2. Take the quiz!
(<https://5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-language>)
3. Make it a priority to learn and practice your partner's love language daily.

Learn more in this book: *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*, by Gary Chapman.

TIP #10

Surrender your relationship



Accepting that not everything is under your control, and having faith in God/Higher Power/Universe, as well as in yourselves, can be invaluable in times of uncertainty and crisis.

Every relationship hits growing pains, milestones, or crisis.

When certain issues are out of your control, practice "radical acceptance." How?:

1. Acknowledge what's out of your control.
2. Suspend judgment, and replace it with noticing and letting things flow.
3. Be willing to not "fix" it, but just accept what is, and like everything, it's temporary.
4. Remember past "miracles," "blessings," "successes." Have faith.
5. Stay in the present and "choose" to surrender control each time you go back to panic. Pray.

Learn more in these books: *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, by Peter Scazzero and *Radical Acceptance*, by Tara Brach.

Thank you!

Our hope is that these tips help you feel more connected, hopeful, and equipped to nurture your relationship. We hope you check out the suggested readings that inspired these tips to further empower you to enjoy a relationship full of passion and connection.

Courage To Shine Counseling provides therapeutic services that focus on increasing confidence and helping people live fulfilled lives.



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Feel Connected, Inspired, and Empowered Again!

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