

A TALKING POINT: HAVE A WEEKLY DATE NIGHT

(Read it, talk about it, adapt it, & use it to benefit your marriage)

One night a week, come hell or high water, you and your spouse should go out alone to enjoy each other's company. You can do anything, go anywhere, and talk about anything except three things: money, children, and work. (Unless it's exciting stuff – I got a promotion, our child has been selected as valedictorian.) Many couples laugh and tell me there's nothing else to talk about. I reassure them that they'll find something – they didn't fall in love because of scintillating conversations about kids and money. You fell in love discussing what was interesting to you. On your date nights, it's time to return to that place in yourself where you are interested and interesting. It is this night, the same each week, that no one plans anything else without first clearing it with the other.

If you have young kids, make a standing arrangement with a babysitter or a family member for that night of the week, or swap babysitting with a friend if necessary. And if you must miss date nights because you have to attend an event on the assigned evening, you must make it up on another evening that week. The date must last a minimum of two hours. If a date day works better for you, go for that. If you have a newborn, and are uncomfortable using a babysitter, take the infant with you if you must, but get out of the house. Avoid meeting any other couple for at least the first two hours of your date.

The date night is about one thing: enjoying each other's company. It's about kindness and tenderness. Talk to your spouse about the things he or she loves to talk about. Be quiet and listen. Enjoy your lover's voice, perspective, and life energy. Tell a joke. Laugh at yourself. Hold your mate's face in your hands and smile. With every giggle comes a deeper love and bond. Take turns planning the date night, or create a "grab bag" of ideas for dating fun. Each of you writes three dates you would like to have on slips of paper to put in a bag. Pick one slip of paper out of the bag three or four days before the date, and start planning it together. One couple's grab bag ideas included painting, reading MAD magazines, and bicycling – three things they had never done since getting married 17 years earlier. This way you avoid that stale moment in the car when both of you look at each other dumbfounded and say "Whaddaya wanna do?" "I dunno. Whadda you wanna do?" - which is another way of saying, "I am not taking this date thing too seriously."

Get yourself a little charged up about spending time alone with your lover and soul mate. Make some nights a surprise in which you don't tell your spouse what you've planned until you are already on your way out together. Every time out doesn't have to be dazzling, just thoughtful enough to say, "I put some effort into this, and wanted to find something different to do. Let's find some new fun together."

Your date night doesn't have to be an extravaganza. Sometimes my clients tell me "I live in a town that closes at 10:00 pm." But walking is a wonderful way to connect – it lessens the intensity of a dinner, where couples have to face each other, and it gives you the outdoors to focus on. If it's cold, walk in a mall – and have fun people watching and window shopping. Cooking is a creative and sensual experience: research recipes and purchase the ingredients together. Many mega bookstores are perfect places for exploring. Have a coffee, play some scrabble, and scan books together. Even a small bookstore provides a wide variety of reading. Sit on the floor between the aisles, and share interesting points on many topics. Read each other some jokes as well as some lovemaking tips.

Spirit comes from inside: focus on fun, and you will find perfect play activities to enjoy together with laughter.

Excerpted from: "Emotional Infidelity", by M. Gary Neuman. Published by Three Rivers Press, 2001

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

On your date night, use the following two lists to take a “crash course” in your spouse. Each person can ask two questions from each list.

Getting to know where you’ve been:

- Who was your closest childhood friend?
- What was your favorite adventure or act of mischief?
- Who was your favorite teacher and why?
- Who was your worst teacher and why?
- What was one of your saddest memories?
- What was one of your happiest memories?
- What was your favorite holiday? Explain.
- Who was your most loved pet, and what did you love about that pet?
- Where were the most exciting places you’ve been, and what was so wonderful about them?

Getting to know where you are today?

- What was your high and low of the day?
- What are your dreams and wishes?
- Name three qualities you like the most about yourself?
- What is sexy to you?
- What is passionate?
- Name one thing you would change about yourself?
- You could feel closer to me if I _____.
- Describe your perfect day.
- Where is the place you want to visit the most and why?
- If you were an animal, you’d be a _____. Explain.