

Love Rekindled: Simple But Powerful Changes to Restore Intimacy

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Couples often seek guidance and help with rekindling their positive feelings for one another and re-establishing a sense of love within their marriage. Unfortunately, in trying to reclaim closeness, many partners fall into the trap of broaching the subject with complaints instead of requests. While they may try to protect themselves by using “you messages” rather than “I” messages, which feels riskier, they often feel more alienated and discouraged. Translating someone's complaints about your shortcomings and mistakes into a request for closeness is challenging.

Words like “always” and “never” applied to complaints virtually guarantee that the receiving spouse will not hear much beyond that. They typically move into defensively considering exceptions to the global complaint and immediately dismiss or defend any presenting concern. The partner making the ill-fated attempt to communicate their longing for love, appreciation, and significance will receive a combination of angry outbursts, belittling remarks, demands, scolding, harassment, or emotional withdrawal. Instead of conveying their intended message of “Pay attention to me. I miss you,” they unintentionally communicate the opposite.

In many cases, each spouse considers themselves good at communication, while both participate in this defensive dance of engagement. With all the hurt, disappointment, and frustration that results, both partners typically perceive the other spouse to be solely responsible for the issues at hand, convinced that the only solution lies in their partner's willingness to change. Thus, they find themselves stuck in an impasse, unwilling to alter their own behavior until their partner changes. Consequently, they avoid spending quality time together, clinging to well-worn excuses that maintain the status quo.

However, the truth is that restoring intimacy and positive feelings in a relationship requires taking full responsibility for one's actions and contribution to both the problems and solutions. Taking risks is necessary to make progress, even when the other person is not changing or taking risks themselves.

When partners practice gratitude for having their spouse in their life and consider what they can do to make their partner's life easier or better, they often witness a gradual improvement in the relationship. It is intriguing how partners often attribute this positive change solely to the efforts of their spouse, disregarding the fact that both individuals are actively changing and contributing to the solutions.

If you're looking to enhance intimacy and strengthen your bond with your spouse, here are seven simple steps to consider:

1. Dedicate daily time to connect with your spouse. Prioritize conversations and plan regular date nights. Create a list of enjoyable activities and seize the opportunity to engage in them together. Use [The Honey Jar](#) or some other couple communicate exercise (e.g. [The "Ing" List](#) or [Couple's Feelings Meetings](#)) to get the ball rolling.
2. Transition from expressing your needs through hostile and complaining language to directly and respectfully asking for what you want or need.
3. Utilize "I" statements, such as "I want," "I feel," and "I need." Avoid using "I think," as it often leads to discussing your partner instead of yourself. Avoid phrases like "I feel that/like/as if" since these reflect thoughts rather than emotions and may turn into editorial comments about your spouse.
4. Make a genuine effort to understand your spouse's perspective instead of engaging in arguments to make them see your point of view. Use active listening.
5. Embrace and accept your partner for who they are, rather than approaching them as a "home improvement project."

6. Extend common courtesy to your spouse, treating them with the same kindness and respect you would offer a stranger. Open car doors, inquire if they need anything when you head to the store or kitchen, use "please" and "thank you" liberally, and freely give compliments.
7. Show your partner that they are loved and cherished in their desired "[love language](#)."

If you find yourself thinking, "But what about me?" despite attempting these changes, it's likely that you haven't fully embraced these behavior adjustments or allowed enough time to reap the benefits of your changes. Often, when one partner exclaims, "I've done all this in the past, and it didn't work," the other partner will counter with, "No, you haven't." Restoring love and intimacy requires effort, patience, and a willingness to change. By implementing these simple changes, you and your partner can take meaningful strides toward reviving the deep connection you desire.

The Honey Jar helps couples create a safe and comfortable space to communicate and express their thoughts and feelings. It allows couples to practice active listening and recognize the emotions behind their partner's words. The Honey Jar helps couples restore closeness to build healthier relationships.

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