

Resolutions Every Couple Should Make

It's that time of year again. The time of year where we all make resolutions to get more exercise, eat more healthfully, break bad habits, etc. The desire for self-improvement is wonderful, and I'm not suggesting that people don't make those resolutions for themselves. I'm suggesting that in addition, we make resolutions to improve and strengthen our relationships, as well as ourselves.

Resolution #1: Increase Physical Touch

It should be no surprise that this is my number one suggestion. So many couples get lost in the routines of their daily lives that they forget how important it is that we have physical touch and affection in our relationships. I'm not just talking about sex, although I do believe that should be a priority as well. Daily physical touch is more than that. It includes kissing, hugging, cuddling, holding hands, thoughtful touches on the arm or back. As I've discussed in previous articles about touch, we know that physical touch lowers the levels of Cortisol (a hormone produced due to stress) and increases the release of Oxytocin (a hormone responsible for pair-bonding and trust). Thus, in addition to helping your partner relieve feelings of stress and anxiety, your touch also helps to improve feelings of trust, empathy, and helps create a stronger bond between the two of you. As a couple, make a New Year's Resolution to be more physically affectionate every day.

Resolution #2: Express Appreciation & Gratitude

Research supports that expressing gratitude can strengthen personal relationships and it makes us happier and healthier, in general (Gordon, et. al, 2011). It's easy to take one another for granted, especially if you've been together for several years. Expressing your appreciation for all of the little things that your partner does can show them that you're paying attention and that you care. Appreciation and gratitude also tends to help couples feel more connected; which in turn, breeds more appreciation and gratitude and decreases resentments. It's a wonderful thing. As a couple, make a New Year's Resolution to express your appreciation more for the things you value, admire, or love about each other.

Resolution #3: Spend Quality Time Together

It is so important for couples to prioritize their relationship, and carve out quality time for each other. Quality time together means you are giving each other your undivided attention. I suggest turning off all electronics (cell phones, iPads, TV's, etc.). Watching a movie together could be considered quality time; however, it may not mean as much as a quiet dinner together, where you could talk to one another. This time together should be mindful, and planned as often as possible. Perhaps a weekly "date night" where you can each take turns planning the date for that week. Or maybe sitting down and planning time off together for a long weekend away, every few months. Please note that in my professional opinion, playing Candy Crush together doesn't *really* count as "date night." As a couple, make a New Year's Resolution to spend more quality time together and make your relationship a priority that needs regular attention.

Resolution #4: Random Acts of Kindness

Random acts of kindness can include many different kinds of things. One may be an act of service, for example, doing something for them that eases their burden of responsibilities, without them having to ask.

Another example is giving a thoughtful gift for no reason, like sending the person flowers, just because it's Thursday. According to Dr. Gary Chapman, "The perfect gift or gesture shows that you are known, you are cared for, and you are prized above whatever was sacrificed to bring the gift to you." Sometimes, actions do speak louder than words. Show each other how much you love and care for one another by incorporating random acts of kindness toward each other into your daily living. As a couple, make a New Year's Resolution to think about what your partner would most like or need, and try to give that to them unexpectedly.

Finally...

None of this Resolution talk would be complete if I didn't address the steps we need to take to turn a behavior change into a habit. Making and keeping a Resolution takes commitment and consistency. How long will it take? According to Emily vanSonnenberg (2011), "There is no one standard time period for a habit to form, it can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days. More specifically, the period of time depends on the difficulty of the activity being learned and the level of commitment on the part of the individual." There is plenty of research that shows that it takes at least 66 days to break a bad habit. So, if you already have bad relationship habits, we know that it will take at least two months or so to break those habits. Be patient with each other, help each other, and above all remain committed to whatever resolution(s) you make. Being consistent, whether that means doing something daily, weekly, or monthly is key to achieving your goal together.

Good Luck & Happy New Year!

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