

Relationship REBOOT

Have you and your partner lost that loving feeling? We asked the experts to share their tips on how to get on better

Relationships can be tricky to navigate at the best of times. Throw the pandemic into the mix, and it's no surprise that UK family law firms have reported a surge of more than 40%* in divorce inquiries in recent months. So, if your relationship is in need of a refresh, you're not alone. But if things have gone stilted, and communicating seems to be getting harder, there are ways to get back on track. Here's how...

1. LIVE IN THE PRESENT

Just as it's unrealistic to wish you had the same wedding now that you had in your 20s, we're trying to recreate the fireworks you felt when you met. "Time changes a relationship," says Neil Wilkie, author of *Reset: Finding a New Course After Drifting Apart*. "Things can't be the same as

they were before careers, age, money and life changes." Focus on a relationship that's realistic and achievable. Work towards goals of mutual respect, appreciation and having fun in each other's company – which could be something as simple as booking a date night once a fortnight, and sticking to it.

2. FOCUS ON LISTENING

A troubled relationship often has a lack of communication, with arguments going round in circles," says Neil.

One way to ensure that both of you have an equal say could be to combine an open discussion with – wait for it – a head massage.

"The idea is that the person receiving the head massage listens, while the person doing the giving talks," says Jarver Matharu, founder of women's holistic wellness app Elara Care. "Plus, if someone is in a relaxed state, they're more likely to respond in a supportive manner." Search "Indian head massage" for demos to get the right technique.

3. MAKE NEW MEMORIES

"One of the best ways to rekindle a romance is to experience new things together," says Dr Laura Vowels, principal researcher and therapist at sex therapy app Blueheart. "It doesn't have to be extravagant, but it can help broaden your mindset. Doing it with your partner can strengthen the bond between you both. Sometimes it can help you to see your partner in a new light."

4. EXPRESS GRATITUDE

"If you've been in a relationship for a while, it can be easy to take each other for granted," says Dr Vowels. "Identify and express gratitude for the things your partner does for you throughout the week, whether that's making you lunch or saying something kind."

5. GET TOGETHER AND CILINGE THE H.W. YOU WATCH NETFLIX

Tend to binge-watch solo? "Watching TV separately, but at the same time, can be deadly for a relationship – you're fixed on a screen, not engaging with each other," says relationship expert Jessica Leoni, from illicitcounters.com. "Even worse, you lead separate lives in separate rooms – maybe he likes sport, while you enjoy period dramas." The solution is simple, but can help to create a bond: "If you are both into the same box set, don't get ahead of each other," says Jessica. "Watch together and talk about what you liked and why with a glass of wine afterwards."

6. TAKE SMALL STEPS TO SEX

"Desire discrepancy is normal, with most couples experiencing a dramatic drop after only two years," says sex and relationship expert Megwyn White. "There are many reasons that sex gets put on the back burner, especially in a long-term relationship. Focus on small steps," says Megwyn. "You don't need to conquer the issue by having full sex. You may make a compromise by starting with a cuddling date, holding hands or even just making eye contact – anything that will help support you and your partner getting closer together."

7. BE OPEN

Spicing someone's feelings can lead to more pain later. "Be honest with your partner," says Samantha Evans, sexual wellness expert and co-founder of Jo Divine. "If you feel you can't do that alone, try counselling. It can make a real difference," says Neil. "Breakthroughs normally come within the first three sessions after couples have been able to truly listen, understand the root cause of the problems and have started to change their behaviours." Tryrelate.org.uk

8. BE HILARY OF GR. IND GESTURES

If you struggle to express yourself verbally, small gestures can make a big difference – but the emphasis is on small. "Picking up their favourite snacks when you go shopping, or putting on their favourite film if they've had a long day, shows them you care," says Dr Vowels. "These moments are more meaningful than extravagant displays of affection in helping your partner to feel valued."

9. TRY GOING TO BED NAKED

Stripping off could help to boost intimacy levels – though you just might need to crank up the central heating. "Get into bed together without any clothes on – not for sex, just to be clothes-free," says Jarver. "Removing clothing lowers barriers and creates vulnerability between a couple, which, in turn, allows for conversation and connection. Try to do this when you've had a good day together, in order to create a positive and safe association with being naked."

55%

The number of couples who cite 'growing apart' as the cause for divorce**.

10. DON'T PILE ON THE PRESSURE

"Try to avoid becoming too dependent on your partner in terms of expecting them to fulfil your happiness. This can put a lot of strain on a relationship," says Carolynne Bennett, an advanced level of attraction coach. "Of course, emotional support is essential in a partnership, but emotional dependency can become toxic – and it's an easy line to cross. For example, if you feel distressed or upset by something in daily life, try to be your own 'best' by empowering yourself to solve it, rather than immediately looking to your partner to sort it out for you. Troubling emotional dependence often stems from feeling insecure in childhood – if it's a long-term problem for you, therapy can help."

10 DON'T PILE ON THE PRESSURE

'Try to avoid becoming too dependent on your partner in terms of expecting them to fulfil your happiness. This can put a lot of strain on a relationship,' says Carlyne Bennett, an advanced law of attraction coach. Of course, emotional support is essential in a partnership, but emotional dependency can become toxic – and it's an easy line to cross. For example, if you feel distressed or upset by something in daily life, try to be your own 'hero' by empowering yourself to solve it, rather than immediately looking to your partner to sort it out for you. Troubling emotional dependence often stems from feeling insecure in childhood – if it's a long-term problem for you, therapy can help.