

## Oops, Mea Culpa, My Bad...How to Apologize and Mean It!

***“I asked you to take the garbage out before you left this morning, and you didn’t do it. Now we missed our garbage pickup for another week! Our garbage will overflow!”***

When your partner gets upset with something you have done—or failed to do—do you know how to take responsibility?

A major factor in being accountable is apologizing the right way. Accountability means accepting responsibility for the impact your words and actions have on others. Yes, we know it’s hard! But our ability to rise to the occasion can make or break our relationships.

### What the research says

One of our favorite relationship scientists and therapists, Dr. John Gottman, has found in his research that couples who apologize to each other and move on from negative emotional events create stronger relationships. Couples can put hurt and shame behind them and return to feeling emotionally connected. Drs Julie and John Gottman write: “one person’s response will literally change the brain waves of the other person.”

### How not to screw up when you apologize

- **Don’t say “if.”** *Never* say “I’m sorry *if* I hurt your feelings.” That is gaslighting. Take out the *if* and you’ll do better.
- **Don’t say “but,”** as in “Sorry, but I was in a hurry.” You are making excuses for yourself instead of being accountable.
- **Avoid arguing.** Acknowledge your partner’s feelings and make things right.
- **Don’t let wounds poison your love.** Don’t let your pride cause you to hold on to being “right.” Taking responsibility will allow you to let go of resentment so you can improve your relationship.

### How to apologize and mean it

- **Say “I am sorry” and “I was wrong.”** Be specific about what you did to hurt, humiliate, or embarrass your partner.
- **Keep going after sorry.** Explain how it happened and what you’ll do to fix things. Explain how you plan to repair the situation (if possible). For example, you could offer to take the garbage to the dump.
- **Explain your words or actions** without making excuses or placing blame. Use “I” statements rather than “You” statements. For instance, “I forgot to take out the garbage because my boss called and told me to come to the office right away. I am very sorry for forgetting.”
- **Ask your partner to grant you forgiveness.** Be specific about what needs to be forgiven and ask for forgiveness when you don’t have any distractions around.

## **How to ask for an apology**

If **you** are the one seeking accountability, raise your concerns skillfully so they can respond skillfully. We know from research that how a conversation begins can predict how it is going to end. If you use a harsh tone or critical approach, it will be harder for your partner to respond well.

When you raise your concerns, do so gently. Avoid words like “always” and “never” and share how you’re feeling about a *particular* situation. If you’ve contributed to a misunderstanding or poor outcome, acknowledge your part.

## **Takeaways**

Taking accountability and granting forgiveness will strengthen your relationship. Dr. Cheryl Fraser of the Gottman Institute calls it the “mindful apology”: she teaches couples to apologize, forgive, and begin again. We all make mistakes. When you apologize and mean it, you can keep your relationship out of the garbage!

## Did you stuff it down or fight it out?

Ash grew up in a boisterous family with two parents for therapists. When one person felt upset about something, everyone heard about it. Sometimes that involved shouting, hurt feelings, and tears, but when it was over they laughed and hugged and moved onto the next activity.

Contrast that with Ash's partner, Jaden, whose family rarely expressed hurt feelings directly. Instead they told someone else in the family, hoping the information would be passed along. The triangulation meant things were rarely resolved. Instead they were buried, and no one was accountable.

### What the research says

Research tells us that our family patterns can affect us later in our romantic relationships. For example, [Dr. Mengya Xia led a study](#) in grad school to explore how interpersonal skills and family factors affect romantic relationships. The researchers concluded that family factors affected interpersonal skills.

"The family relationship is the first intimate relationship of your life, and you apply what you learn to later relationships," Dr. Xia said. "It's also where you may learn how to constructively communicate—or perhaps the inverse, to yell and scream—when you have a disagreement."

### Key takeaways

- **Accept ownership.** Relationships are a shared responsibility. When both partners are invested as co-owners of the relationship, the relationship has opportunity to grow and flourish.
- **Keep the emotional energy flowing.** Love relationships are fuelled by emotional energy. The relationship is at risk when one or both partners withdraw their emotional investment in the relationship. Even the strongest relationships have conflict, mistakes, mishaps, and misgivings. It's the way you handle them that makes the difference.
- **Early relationships set the tone but are not set in stone.** Ash and Jaden learned different ways of dealing with conflict from their family relationships, but that doesn't mean their relationship has to work the same way. Although our family upbringing influences how we behave, we can create stronger, more effective ways of handling conflict in positive ways.
- **Disagreements can be constructive.** Conflicts can be a sign of investment and energy in the relationship. When both partners can take ownership for their roles in conflict and disconnection, their relationship will become stronger.

- **Consider your earlier relationships and how you handled conflict.** Do you believe making an apology means there's something wrong with you? Do you find yourself taking more than your share of the responsibility for the relationship, profusely offering apologies to quiet the tone and avoid conflict? Reflect on how you manage your conflict and accountability in your current relationship, and discuss with your partner.

### **A happy ending**

Even though Ash and Jaden grew up handling conflict in very different ways, they have reflected on their different family patterns together. Now they do their best to bring forward grievances and make amends in constructive ways.

Ash gives Jaden space when he's upset, and Jaden knows Ash can never go to bed without hashing things out. They openly discuss things when hurt feelings come up, and they are stronger for it. And they are forging new, healthier patterns to hand down to their children.

## 2-4-6-8, Who Do We Appreciate?

Have you ever seen a baby take their first steps? Their parents praise and encourage them to toddle across the room. Babies and small children soak up the approval of their parents and other caregivers, their faces beaming from the praise.

On the other hand, have you ever worked for a boss who didn't seem to appreciate anything you did? It seemed like no matter how hard you try, they were critical and demeaning. It made you feel totally crummy.

### What the research says

As humans, we are hardwired to crave appreciation. Psychotherapist and social worker Marcia Naomi Berger [explains that](#) feeling valued and appreciated are basic human needs.

As the author of *Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love: 30 Minutes a Week to the Relationship You've Always Wanted*, Berger says appreciation helps us be our best selves. It puts us in touch with the same center of the brain of that waddling one-year-old. Regular appreciation from your partner also prepares you for facing the tough times together.

Berger believes the secret of relationship success is finding a partner who makes us feel the best about ourselves. Bring on the appreciation!

Just like those babies learning to walk, when we receive praise we want to repeat our behavior. And receiving a compliment from someone also makes us like and appreciate them more. Add to that a person we love, and whose love and respect we crave, and bingo!

### Putting it into practice

Berger recommends holding weekly meetings for partners to check in with each other on their relationship, but cautions that appreciation should not wait for those meetings. If you aren't great at it, or your partner isn't great, don't despair. Our app will give you more opportunities and tools to improve your appreciation in the coming months!

Berger advises partners to [express appreciation daily](#). "If a pipe bursts or if a chore needs to be done immediately, you don't wait for your marriage meeting to call a plumber or to arrange how to handle the pressing task."

Don't wait until your house is flooded. Tell your partner what you love about them now. Go, baby, go!

## Can you be more curious than Stephen Colbert?

*If you could only listen to one song for the rest of your life, what would it be?  
What do you think happens when we die?*

These are just some of the questions Stephen Colbert asked Keanu Reeves. Colbert wanted to understand what makes Reeves tick. Colbert and other talk show hosts always make their guests feel like they are the most fascinating people in the world! You can do that too.

You are obviously a curious person, since you downloaded the Our.Love™ app. Now let's apply that to your relationship!

Remember the early days, when you wanted to know everything about your partner?

*How do you get along with your siblings?  
Where's your favorite place to go on vacation?*

Sometimes it felt like you were being interviewed *by* Colbert! "I must be fascinating!" Now it's more like:

*When do we need to take Bella to the vet?  
Did you remember to pick up Sophia's prescription?*

Yawn! What happened to feeling like we're the most fascinating people in the world?

What happened is your curiosity muscles need a workout. For most adults, Curiosity is one of the most important (and underappreciated!) love skills. If you come back for a few minutes each day, we'll help you master curiosity and the six other critical love skills.

One thing we hope you'll no longer be curious about is what makes love great – love that feels honoring, that *lifts* up, that *lights* up. But first: Let's talk about why curiosity is so important!

### What the research says

Research shows curious people are happier and less stressed. Psychology professor Todd Kashdan's book *Curious? Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life* says "when we act on our curiosity, we feed our brains and are in the greatest position to enrich our lives."

### Why is curiosity especially vital in loving relationships?

At its core, curiosity is about a deep desire to *understand*, *learn*, and *grow*. While curiosity is helpful anywhere, it is **vital** in our relationships. When we master curiosity, we start to delight in understanding *how* our partner thinks, not only *what* they think. As your mastery improves in the coming weeks and months, we'll explore this higher form of curiosity together in Our.Love.

***For now, remember this: A question a day keeps the relationship gremlins away!***

### Watch out for...

- **Fakery.** Be genuinely curious. Does Stephen Colbert dial it in?

- **Overtalking.** LISTEN more than you speak. Our.Love can help! Our emotion detection biometrics game Talk 2 Me™ includes built-in questions and guidance to develop your own. The tracker will tell you how much time you spoke and how well you listened. You'll get to explore Talk 2 Me after you complete a few more exercises!

### **So, can you channel Colbert?**

Here's a little secret: You have it in you to make your partner feel like the most fascinating person in the world. Watch Colbert with his wife, Evie, and see how they interact. It's clear they find the other person endlessly fascinating! They do it by constantly seeking out each other's thoughts. *That* may seem like some ju-jitsu level curiosity. It's not. It's awareness and practice.

### **Ready for a first taste?**

Ask your partner one of the questions below. You can even text them the question and discuss it later. If you want to be a real superstar (we know you do!), choose three questions and schedule one each for the next three days:

- If you could have dinner with a fictional character, who would it be?
- If you were to have a different career, what would you do?
- What's your sweetest memory?
- If you could travel into the past, what time period would you choose?
- Who was your favorite teacher and why?

**Bottom line:** If you stay curious about each other, you're more likely to be happier and better prepared for life's challenges. You are both way more interesting than you think!

## How Curiosity Fuels Connection

### What does curiosity have to do with love?

Babies soak up interest and affection from their parents or siblings...or the family dog. As kids grow up, they crave attention when performing stunts on the playground or on the sports field. We grow up becoming hardwired to appreciate other people's interest.

Curiosity fuels our connection with others. As we grow up, that need for people to be interested in us might lessen, but it's still present.

When we first met our partner, curiosity set the wheels of discovery in motion. And when we continue to be curious about our partner, we deepen our understanding of ourselves and each other, and the depth of our love.

### What the research says

Dr. Edward Tronick, a world-class researcher and educator, conducted the still-face experiment. First, he asked mothers to engage playfully with their infants, cooing, smiling, and sending love signals.

When the mothers were asked to turn these signals off, the babies protested with arched backs, shrill squeals, cries of frustration, and arms stretched out, as if to say, "Where are you? Where did you go? Come back!"

When the mothers re-engaged emotionally, the babies quickly rebounded back into joy and reassurance.

We are more mature than babies, of course, but we still crave connection and want our loved ones to be curious about us too.

### Watch out for distractions

Curiosity fuels connection, but life can get in the way sometimes.

"How was your day?" your partner might ask, stirring the pasta sauce, checking the phone, then glancing to see you race by, responding "fine." Just like the babies in the experiment, our relationships can handle some of this, but they cannot handle a lot.

We are wired for connection. If distracted interactions persist, the relationship is vulnerable to disconnection. When this happens, the curiosity of another is like a magnet. We are drawn to those who show interest in us. When curiosity is turned off, so is connection, and this can be fatal to a relationship.

## How curiosity fuels connection

Imagine the coming-home scenario again. Your partner turns off the stove and meets your eyes with, “How was your day?”

“I feel agitated and upset, but I’m not sure why,” you respond.

“Dinner can wait,” says your partner. “Let’s talk about it.”

How would that make you feel? Loved and cared for? More connected to your partner?

Not only do you feel more loved, but your partner also benefits. When we slow down and ask truly curious questions, our own self-awareness expands. We have a better understanding of who we are as individuals and as a couple. Just like babies, we discover who we are through the eyes of our loved ones.

## Put it into practice

Remember those babies who craved their mothers’ attention? Even though no longer a baby, your partner still needs your attention and curiosity.

Next time your loved one asks about your day, respond truthfully. How was your day, really?

Next time you ask your partner “how are you?” use this question as an opener, not an end point. Probe. Show interest. Engage. Be **curious**.

## **Getting curious pays off in every area of your life**

Online dating fail: you dress up for a night out and your date doesn't ask you a single question about yourself. Don't be that person, even if you're in a long-term committed partnership. Failed Dater hasn't learned that asking questions about others is the key to building intimate relationships.

Jonathan Van Ness from "Queer Eye" fame hosts "Getting Curious," a Netflix show that started out as a podcast. He interviews experts on subjects ranging from tear gas and cicadas to being an ex-nun. If you've ever watched "Queer Eye," you'll know Jonathan wins over anyone who is uncomfortable around him. He knows the secret: genuine interest and curiosity wins every time.

### **What the research shows**

[Researcher Todd Kashdan conducted a study](#) to measure how important curiosity is in building relationships. Participants discussed increasingly intimate questions with research assistants. The research assistants reported they felt much closer to participants who were curious and engaged.

In another study, Kashdan asked college students to have an intimate conversation or make small talk with students they hadn't met before. Whether making small talk or discussing personal information, more curious students felt closer to each other than the less curious. Kashdan's research suggests that being curious and asking questions fosters intimacy.

### **Why it matters**

We are naturally drawn to people who want to know us better. If you want to be loved more by your partner, be curious about them! Your partner will feel much closer to you, the same way Kashdan's research assistants felt about their interview subjects. Kashdan concluded that curiosity and interest are the secret juice of keeping a partnership healthy and vibrant in the long run.

Getting curious and interested in others will not only help you in love...it will also strengthen your friendships and relationships with your kids. It will even help you be more successful at work!

### **Putting it into practice**

So you're no Jonathan Van Ness? That's okay. All.Love's tools help you train yourself to be more curious and revitalize your intimate relationships. Here's a simple assignment for the next week:

The next time you have a quiet moment with your partner, ***ask them a question you haven't asked in a while.*** Then pay close attention to their answer.

It doesn't have to be a serious question—it can even be silly like “who's your favorite member of the Queer Eye Fab 5”?

You'll be training your mind to lead with a question, which is the essence of curiosity. Keep steady eye contact and radiate as much kindness in your expression as possible.

Have fun learning new things about your partner by getting curious!

## Turn on the Accelerator in the Bedroom!

If you think you need to:

- Have sex a certain number of days per week
- Have an orgasm every time you're intimate
- Master a glossy magazine full of positions to keep it *hot*

...this article is going to be a game changer!

Author and sex educator Dr. Emily Nagoski says, "The key to assessing your own sexual wellbeing is not how much you want sex, but how much you like the intimacy you are having. *Pleasure is the measure.*"

Let's talk about how to accelerate your pleasure for both you and your partner.

### What the research says

Research shows that couples with a strong physical connection have two things in common:

- They are great friends to one another
- They prioritize intimacy

Dr. John Gottman's research shows that couples who are loving and affectionate outside of the bedroom have greater sexual satisfaction.

### ***Did you know giving your partner compliments and affection can be a form of foreplay?***

As we've learned with the other love skills, being curious and present during quality time, offering support, and practicing vulnerability can unleash your sex drives.

Psychologist and sexologist Dr. Peggy Kleinplatz studies "extraordinary lovers," adults of all ages and types who have amazing sex. In her book *Magnificent Sex*, she makes clear that sex is not just for the young and beautiful. In fact, she's found people in their mid-fifties who are having the best sex of their lives!

### How do I have this magnificent sex?

- **Unlearn everything and overcome shame and guilt about your fantasies.** Dr. Kleinplatz's couples had to let go of what they'd learned about sex: the myths, stereotypes, and shame and guilt.
- **Know your accelerators.** Learn what turns you on (accelerators). Watching a sexy scene in a movie? Slinky lingerie? Aphrodisiac foods? A romantic massage? For many people (especially women), laughing together, feeling appreciated, and spending quality time activates their accelerators.
- **Just as important, understand your brakes.** What turns you off? Watching that sexy scene with your teenagers in the room? Your toddler walks in on you while you're getting romantic? An old ratty t-shirt? Feeling criticized, judged, blamed, or disrespected shuts down the libido

immediately. Many people who struggle with desire, arousal, or orgasm feel their brakes more than their accelerators.\*

- **Buy some toys!** Invest in sex books, toys, bedroom underwear and lingerie, and videos to warm you up and help you learn how to be a better lover. (Word to the wise: porn has completely unrealistic sex. As long as you know that, watch away!)
- **Fantasize.** Sex educators and therapists Kimberly Huggins and Braithwaite suggest creating fantasy fiction. Spend 10 minutes free-writing about the type of sex you want. How do you want to feel before, during, and after? You can each do this exercise and share your writing—hearing your partner fantasize about making love to you is sure to level up your love life!

Although sex can change as we get older, you can be magnificent lovers at any age. Nurturing our friendship with our partner builds trust and primes you for intimacy. Fire up those engine accelerators!

\*This is especially true for people who grew up in sexually shaming cultures or those who have experienced sexual harm. When arousal is linked with danger, sexual stimulation may remain a brake even after the danger has passed. Therapy with a trauma-informed therapist can help folks learn how to experience pleasure in a way that feels safe.

## Why Sex is Good for You—and How to Make It Better

Cameron loves to have her back scratched, while Kendall cannot tolerate it. Instead, Kendall loves it when Cameron rubs his back.

Jade gets turned on by slow, deep kisses, while Aaliyah loves to slow dance in the living room before they are intimate.

Each one of us has our own erogenous zones (parts of the body sensitive to sexual stimulation), and it's your partner's fun responsibility to discover where they are!

### What the research says

[Extensive research proves](#) that human touch offers amazing emotional and physical health benefits. Our need for touch begins as soon as we're born, like with baby Emma. As adults we benefit greatly from intimate touch.

Did you know sex is healthy for you? Here's how, according to [a 2016 research study](#):

- Relieves stress and pain
- Improves sleep
- Boosts immune system
- Reduces prostate cancer risks
- Reduces blood pressure and cardiovascular risks and improves bladder control for women
- Improves well-being and mental health
- Counts as exercise!

Not having sex regularly can have negative benefits, too. During the pandemic, researchers learned those who lacked intimate touch are more likely to be lonely and anxious.

According to [a study in the \*Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy\*](#), couples feel more committed to each other if they have good sex at least once a week. And [couples who compliment each other](#) tend to have higher levels of sexual satisfaction (remember the Appreciation Love Skill!).

### Problems with sex

Unfortunately, some people—often women—[have a difficult time enjoying sex](#). It could be from childhood trauma or sexual abuse or simply shame from the cultural messages women receive about sexuality. For example:

- [Over half of women](#) find it difficult to express what they want in bed. Women who can say the word “clitoris” are more likely to be sexually satisfied!
- [Nearly a quarter of women experienced pain](#) the last time they had sex.
- [If a woman does not feel unattractive](#), she can have lower sexual self-esteem, which often makes her avoid sex.

If one of you does not enjoy sex, getting professional help can vastly improve your relationship.

### **How communication can improve your sex life**

If your partner does not find sex enjoyable, here are a few things to try:

- **Talk about it.** Are both of you satisfied with the frequency and quality of your sex? Discuss how you can improve your intimacy. [Here are three ways](#) to get more comfortable asking for what you want, including a do-it-yourself sex ed kit!
- **Build up anticipation.** Touch intimately without sex to build up sexual desire. Tell your partner how much you love their body. Talk about how this makes you feel.
- **Partners of women, learn what turns them on.** [A study in the Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy](#) found women appreciate feelings of closeness and being viewed as attractive and desirable. For specific tips, read [How to Turn a Woman On According to Science](#) by sex educator Dr. Kaye Smith.
- **If you're straight, learn about the orgasm gap.** Although 95 percent of straight men orgasm almost every time they have sex, only 65 percent of straight women do. (Queer relationships don't experience this same gap.) [Researchers found](#) that just *learning* about this gap improved people's sex lives!

Cindy Gallop, founder of Make Love Not Porn said “Everything great in life and business is born out of great communication. Sex is no different.”

Here's your challenge, if you haven't already conquered this task: Find your partner's erogenous zone and fix that orgasm gap! Start by asking what turns your partner on.

## Eight ways to power up your culture of touch

Kids. Pets. Demanding jobs. Cleaning. Yard work. Elderly parents. Routine. Pandemic stress. Poor communication. Not feeling appreciated.

These stressors can get in the way of physical touch. Most couples begin their relationships affectionately, but over time, physical touch can fade.

### What the research says

Scientists know [physical touch is essential for us to thrive](#). According to a study in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, couples who have sex around once a week are the happiest. The study also found that couples who have sex more than once a week are not any happier, while those who have sex less than once a week feel less fulfilled.

### Did you get that? At least once a week is the sex nirvana!

Physical touch is about more than sex, though. Licensed marriage and family therapist [Kiaundra Jackson notes](#) that physical touch triggers the release of hormones associated with pleasure and bonding:

*"Oxytocin is known as the bonding hormone. That hormone is the same hormone released between a newborn baby and its mother, which is why skin-to-skin contact is highly recommended for bonding after childbirth."*

### Putting it into practice

Here are eight ways to boost your culture of touch every day, which can also boost intimacy:

- **Hold hands, sit close, and kiss in public and private.** Make an effort to touch your partner often. Always kiss them goodbye and hello. Cuddle if you're watching TV or a movie. Play footsie.
- **Cuddle in bed.** What better way to end the day than cuddling the love of your life? If you don't like to fall asleep spooning your partner, go to bed early so you can cuddle.
- **Communicate.** Ask your partner if they are satisfied with your physical touch, both intimate and casual. Listen carefully and openly so you can support each other.
- **Dance!** Dancing allows you to look into your partner's eyes and touch them. You can do it in your kitchen or living room! And it's fun.
- **Give each other a massage, foot rub, or back rub.** These can also be excellent forms of foreplay.

- **Take a bath or shower together.** Use that bath bomb you've been saving. Wash your partner's back. Add bubbles for extra fun.
- **Be playful!** Tousele their hair, squeeze their behind, or nuzzle their neck.
- **Initiate sex,** especially if you don't do that already. Make time for plenty of foreplay.

Clarissa Silva, behavioral scientist and relationship coach, [shares that oxytocin can make you feel safer and more secure](#) while also boosting your immune system. "Physical touch, specifically cuddling, releases oxytocin, the feel-good hormone that makes you feel like nothing can hurt you."

Let's get cozy!

## Three ways to kick up quality time in your relationship

Quality time gets you off your phones and paying attention to your partner. Think back to all the romantic quality time you got when you were first dating. Years later, you might need to be more intentional. Here are three examples of how to do that:

### 1. Share meaningful moments

Thanking your partner for having your back. Cuddling in bed. Giving each other compliments. Texting your partner to share your sex dream. Meaningful moments are when we show up fully in our relationship. They open the door to connection, and the more sensations involved, the better!

There's nothing wrong with planning meaningful moments, even sex. The Our.Love app will help you get them on your calendar!

**What the research shows:** A Penn State University study found that everyday experiences of connection are more important than occasional grand gestures when it comes to lasting love.

You can create what Dr. John Gottman calls “rituals of connection.” For example:

- Leave sticky notes around the house telling your partner why you love them.
- Laugh together. Researchers at the University of North Carolina discovered that laughing together strengthens relationships.
- Give your partner a six-second kiss. (Dr. Gottman believes six-second kisses could be key to improving relationships.)
- Surprise each other...perhaps fill your partner's car with gas, do an item on the “honey do-list,” or buy flowers.

### 2. Go on great dates

The more meaningful moments you have throughout the week, the better your dates will be! What's the difference between a date and a great date? The three Ps:

- **Presence:** Give your partner your *undivided attention*.
- **Persistence:** If your date encounters a hiccup, be flexible. Maybe the food sucks, the conversation stalls, or you have a disagreement. Be patient, apologize if needed, and give each other grace.
- **Playfulness:** Create a space for the two of you. Remember what brought you together as a couple. Relax, let go, and enjoy your partner!

### 3. Plan peak experiences

For many couples, vacations and adventures are the best sources of quality time. What shared activities bring you fulfillment? Perhaps it's an amazing meal, a huge concert or game, accomplishing a shared goal, volunteering, singing in a choir or playing sports, or checking an item off your bucket list. Peak experiences are about living a purposeful life together.

**Put it into practice:**

What activities do you and your partner both enjoy? Discuss your favorite meaningful moments, great dates, and peak experiences. Which of the activities on your list make you feel connected to each other and why? How can you create more of them?

In the coming month, go on a great date and start planning a peak experience. Surprise your partner with some meaningful moments. Your love is worth it!

## ***Can you Hear Me Now?*** **Why Quality Time Matters So Much**

Here's a modern horror story. Are you ready?

You have a super-important job interview, but you have only one bar on your phone! Yikes!

Now think about your relationship. If you have all four bars showing up on your cell phone, you get perfect reception for your conversations. Let's talk about how you can get four bars of connection with your partner.

(And if you feel more joy at seeing four bars on your phone than greeting your partner after work, let's fix that!)

Quality time lets your partner know they are a priority to you and they matter.

### **Here's how it works**

*"I know you have Friday afternoon off this week. I rescheduled my calls so I can take you to that movie you want to see. And then we can go out for dinner. You pick where!"*

A thoughtful gesture not only prioritizes the relationship, but it also communicates, *"I see you, I care about you, your joy matters to me, you are worthy of my time and effort."*

Now imagine dinner at your favorite restaurant, soft music, lovely ambience, full eye contact and full attention, an engaging discussion about the movie - indeed, a quality experience!

Cue the soft lights in the bedroom!

### **Putting it into practice:**

Sending small and consistent messages that your partner is a priority is something we like to call "Two Together," or TTs. These TTs keep your connection solid and strong, and they don't require a lot of time.

Try one of these this weekend, or come up with one of your own:

- **Bring your partner breakfast in bed**, and then sit with them as they eat. No phones; just enjoy each other. Toast and coffee count. Want to start out the day with a laugh? [Try a silly love joke!](#) Here's one:

#### **Why should you never date a tennis player?**

Because love means nothing to them.

- **Take a bath or shower together.** Don't be afraid to get silly! What's not to like about two people who love each other, splashing water at one another?
- **Plan and cook your partner's favorite meal – together.** Go to the grocery store to pick up ingredients together. Chop some broccoli together while watching [Dana Carvey's skit on SNL about chopping broccoli!](#) Or if you want to be really adventurous, recreate a dish from one of your favorite movies via [Binging with Babish](#).

### **Key Takeaways**

Keep your eye on the gauge and your sights on the future. Ask yourself often: How many bars does our relationship have? How strong is *our* connection? Did we laugh together this week? Did we spend at least five solid minutes making warm eye contact while we were both in high spirits?

Plan ahead. Make time. Take time. Your connection is worth it!

Can you hear us yet?

## Ten Simple Ways to Speak “Quality Time”

Jesse and Reece have been married for 12 years. Each Friday they hire a babysitter so they can go out to dinner, phones down, and discuss how their week went. Once a year they go to the beach for a weekend so they can focus on rediscovering why they fell in love with each other in the first place.

### How do you speak love?

After working with couples for many years, Dr. Gary Chapman came up with five ways partners express and experience love, or “[love languages](#)”:

- Acts of service
- Gift-giving
- Physical touch
- Quality time
- Words of affirmation

If you don’t know your love language, [you can find out by taking this quiz](#). Make sure to have your partner take it too, so you can tailor the way you speak your love for them.

Jesse hasn’t always realized the importance of quality time rituals for their relationship. Jesse’s love language is words of affirmation, while Reece’s is quality time.

During the first few years of their relationship, Jesse gave specific words of appreciation to Reece every day. But Reece just wanted more of Jesse’s undivided attention. When they learned they liked to give and receive love in different ways, the couple began communicating better about what they needed and speaking each other’s love language. Giving quality time to your partner makes them feel valued, heard, and loved.

“If you don’t share the same love language as your partner, don’t be surprised if these efforts seem a little unnatural at first,” writes Sherri Gordon in “[How the Quality Time Love Language Impacts Your Relationship](#).” “With time and effort though, you will be doing these things for your partner without a second thought.”

### Ten easy ways to “speak” quality time

Gordon offers nine suggestions on how to devote quality time to your partner, and we’ve added a tenth:

1. Make eye contact
2. Use active listening
3. Set limits on technology
4. Focus on quality, not quantity

5. Make a plan
6. Develop a routine
7. Be present and available
8. Stay in the moment
9. Get creative
10. Have fun!

Now when Jesse and Reece carve out quality time for each other, Reece makes a special effort to give Jesse plenty of words of affirmation. Now they know how to speak each other's love language!

## Don't Let Your Partner Fall

Did you ever go on a “trust walk” when you were young?

If you missed that terrifying experience, imagine the anxiety of being matched with someone in a team-building activity, blindfolded, and led around an obstacle course.

If you were lucky, you were matched with a friend who you could trust not to let you fall. But you might get matched with a stranger—or worse, yet—someone mean who would not guide you to miss obstacles in your path.

Even scarier, “trust falls” require the participant to fall back and trust their partner will catch them!

Think of your relationship like a trust walk or trust fall. Are you there to gently guide your partner, catch them when they fall, and have their backs?

### What the research says

Lack of support is a deal breaker, concludes clinical psychologist Dr. Sue Johnson, who has worked with couples for 30+ years. She has found that emotionally fulfilling relationships make us healthier, both mentally and physically. When partners truly have each other's backs, they thrive and their love blossoms.

Whether your partner is expressing sadness, uncertainty, or excitement, you can respond in a way that brings you closer.

### Key takeaways

Here are a few ways to be an amazing trust walk/fall partner:

- **Listening:** Look them in the eyes as you listen, nod, paraphrase, and most important: show genuine interest in what they are saying. They'll feel supported if you say “that makes sense” or “I can see why you feel that way.”
- **Physical support:** Depending on your partner's preference, they might appreciate a hug or a hand squeeze. If you don't know what kind of physical support they need in the moment, just ask.
- **Spiritual support:** If you are spiritual people, your partner might appreciate an offer to pray with or for them.
- **Giving space:** Some people like to process their feelings alone. If so, support your partner in finding quiet time and a space without distractions. You could offer to run a bath or prepare them a beverage. Ask how much time they need and check in later.
- **Parent rescue:** Offering to watch the kids or make dinner are crowd favorites! Your teammate in parenting will always appreciate your efforts to offload something from their plate.

### Watch out for

Support means demonstrating care for your partner *while* honoring your own boundaries. Women are especially prone to sacrificing for their loved ones while not realizing they have needs too.

This is where your friends and family members can help. Make sure you build an extended community so your partner is not the only one you turn to when you need help. Try texting a friend, journaling, taking a walk, listening to a podcast, or working out. Therapy is good too!

### **Avoid problem solving**

Support is not fixing the problem. When your partner describes their terrible day, it isn't helpful to say, "did you try...?" or "what you should have done was..."

When your partner shares their feelings, ask them what *they* hope to get out of the conversation. Empathy? Advice? Another perspective? Perhaps they just want to be seen and heard.

### **Putting it into practice**

What can you do to have your partner's back? Ask what kind of support your partner likes and remember to be a good listener. Think about ways you can ramp up your physical, emotional, and spiritual support whenever you can. It will make your partnership rock solid!

## Introducing...the Tightest Team Ever!

“We are a team. We look at each other as a team. I never think he’s against me, even when he’s arguing with me. I know his heart. I know he supports me.”

—[Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard](#), married 8 years

Think about the way the greatest sports teams huddle during timeouts. Or how members of the same military unit stay tightly connected years after their shared active duty. This is what we should strive for as a couple. You are your partner’s best teammate.

### What the research says

We are better together. When you feel supported, you are healthier emotionally and physically. Studies show you’re more likely to thrive, survive cancer, recover from heart disease, and feel happier. And when you’re in love, you’re less likely to get stressed, distressed, or sick!

If we feel support and trust in our relationship, we have a “[safe haven](#),” a term coined by John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory. Couples therapist Dr. Gina Senarighi explains it this way:

“A safe haven means we are confident our partner cares about our safety and well-being, they respond when we are distressed...and are a source of physical and emotional support and comfort. Similarly, when our partners are in need, we become a source of warmth, calm, and support for them.”

### Key takeaways

Support is important at all times, but it’s critical when times are bad. When we support our partners when they need it most, they have a safe haven. They know we’re on their team.

Dr. Senarighi suggests these ways to be a safe haven:

- Giving and receiving emotional support
- Giving your complete attention to your partner
- Remembering events and milestones that matter to your partner
- Sharing appreciation and gratitude openly
- Cultivating quality time without distractions
- Asking follow-up questions about your partner’s feelings, needs, concerns, and hopes
- Keeping track of each other’s general well-being
- Helping with practical things when your partner is sick, tired, or overwhelmed
- Letting your partner know why they matter to you

### What to watch out for

It can be hard to offer support when you are feeling tired or disconnected. If this is the case, ease into a conversation. Sometimes a few minutes of quiet time can be helpful when you come home from work. Debrief your day, inviting your partner to understand what you're dealing with. Hold hands and prioritize connecting. Be your partner's safe haven and ask them to be yours.

### **Putting it into practice**

Take a moment to think about your partner now. Dim the sounds and sights around you and focus your attention on how you feel with them. Be comforted by the warmth they bring to your body.

Now consider doing the same during a time of need. Next time you are preparing for a presentation, a medical appointment, or a difficult conversation, ease your tension with your partner's support. Sink into their safe haven.

The stronger our bonds, the more we carry our loved ones with us throughout the day...and the easier our lives will be, knowing we have a safe haven to shelter us from life's storms.

## How to offer support without fixing the problem

Jo: “My boss is driving me crazy. He always takes credit for my ideas!”

Lyn: “Would you like sympathy or solutions?”

Jo and Lyn have been using this stock response, “sympathy or solutions,” any time one of them complains to the other person. This phrase helps the other person understand what kind of support their partner would like in that situation.

Often when we hear our partner fret, we try to jump in and solve their problem. But most likely the person is just looking for support.

## What the research says

Support not only strengthens your relationship, but it also makes both partners healthier! Healthy, supportive relationships can help you live longer, deal with stress, be healthier, and feel richer, according to [the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing at the University of Minnesota](#). Conversely, lack of supportive relationships can result in depression, decreased immune function, and higher blood pressure.

Although it can be tempting to try to solve our partner’s problems, it’s not actually support unless they are asking for our help. Of course you don’t want to cause your partner to get depressed or sick!

## Putting it into practice

In “[Relationship Advice: How to Stop ‘Fixing’ and Start Listening](#),” Dr. Lisa Marie Bobby offers several tips to opening yourself up to supporting without trying to fix:

- **Listen** and don’t give advice unless they ask for it. Just hold space.
- **Acknowledge their feelings.** Let them know you hear them and sympathize.
- **Practice reflexive listening.** Listen with your whole heart and echo back what you are hearing.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** To truly understand, ask clarifying questions such as “how did that make you feel?” or “What happened next?”

## Key takeaways

In addition to supporting your partner when they are facing a difficult situation, they will also appreciate your support when things are going well. Encourage them to cultivate supportive

friendships beyond your relationship. Support them in their career and pursuing their dreams. Ask them how they would like to be supported.

When you begin an intimate relationship, you become your partner's #1 ally. Be there whenever your partner needs a listening ear, and your relationship will become stronger for it.

## **Short Form Blog—Vulnerability**

“Say what you wanna say, and let the words fall out.  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave.” –Sara Bareilles

A few years into their relationship, Charlie revealed a dream to the love of his life, Angel. Charlie dreamed of leaving his accounting career behind to become a nurse. Sharing this dream felt scary and risky, because he had a well-paying job. Charlie also felt sheepish because of the stigma around men becoming nurses. After he got it off his chest, though, he felt so much closer to Angel, who responded supportively.

### **You need to be brave to be vulnerable**

If Charlie knew Angel would support his idea for a career change, he would have shared it without any doubts. But he was anxious because he didn't know how Angel would respond. Being vulnerable requires courage, but as Sara Bareilles sang, your partner wants you to be brave and vulnerable.

Vulnerability is hard, and it feels risky. But, in relationships as in business, without risk there is no reward, so we don't get to skip this decision if our goal is a happy and healthy relationship.

If sharing part of yourself feels risky, you're at vulnerability's doorstep. The next step - the hard part - is walking through that door.

### **What the research says**

Dr. Brené Brown says “vulnerability is our most accurate way to measure courage, and we literally do that as researchers. We can measure how brave you are by how vulnerable you're willing to be.”

Real vulnerability feels big and important...it can feel like stepping onto the high wire without a net! When you're in love, you want to share yourself fully with your partner. When you're vulnerable, you're bringing your authentic self to the relationship. You're willing to step out onto the wire and risk falling to fully be yourself. You're also trusting that your partner will have a net to catch you if you fall.

### **Key takeaways**

Vulnerability depends on each of the other six Love Skills: appreciation, curiosity, support, affection, quality time, and accountability. Charlie needed to feel confident enough in his relationship with Angel to communicate his thoughts openly and honestly, while handling the discomfort involved with vulnerability.

### **Putting it into practice**

This week, think about something you have not shared with your partner. Maybe it's your bucket list, a new skill you want to learn, or a guilty pleasure you want to indulge. Start small and work up to the big stuff!

Find a quiet moment when you can share, and be open. Give your partner time to sit with the information. And then ask your partner to share something with you. Your partner might be confused or surprised with this new information. Feeling safe enough to be vulnerable requires courage for both partners. Creating a safe space for vulnerability is a labor of love.

Go ahead; be brave! You can do it—we have faith in you!

## Are you ready to take off your invisibility cloak?

How many of us have wished for an invisibility cloak like Harry Potter received from Albus Dumbledore? It's tempting to want to retreat sometimes and not have to share what's going on in our minds.

Being in love requires us to take off our invisibility cloaks. Underneath the cloak is our vulnerability.

### What the research says

Before Dr. Brene Brown burst onto the scene, most people were not talking about vulnerability. Before 2010, she was an obscure academic. Then she shared the ground-breaking research she'd been doing on vulnerability and shame at a small TEDx event in 2010. When it went viral, [she was actually horrified](#)...because she shared her own vulnerability in that talk and didn't think it would go much farther than the audience.

We all know how her risk of being vulnerable turned out! Brown has written six number-one *New York Times* bestselling books, hosts two podcasts, and has filmed a lecture for Netflix. She also has 27 employees and a net worth of \$5 million. That vulnerability paid off for her!

Brown believes vulnerability is one of our greatest strengths, because it requires great bravery to take off that invisibility cloak.

"What most of us fail to understand...is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave," says Dr. Brown. "Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy courage, empathy, and creativity."

### Key takeaways

Vulnerability comes down to three letters: ARE. The more vulnerable we can be with those we love, the more **accessible**, **responsive**, and **engaged** they can be with us.

The more we share our vulnerability, fears, needs, and longings, the more our loved ones can be **accessible**, **responsive**, and **engaged**. Taking off your cloak of invisibility is another way of asking:

- ARE you there for me? Can I count on you?
- Do I matter to you?
- Do you see me, know me, understand me?

Harry felt safe taking off his cloak around his loved ones. He put it on only when he needed to protect himself. Can we be brave enough to be truly ourselves around our partners without any need to hide?

When we feel safe, we can take risks in business, education, and in all areas of life. We know we have a safe place to land if we fail. We can grow and learn from our successes and our failures. We can give and receive love freely.

### **Putting it into practice**

We all need to be seen without our invisibility cloaks. We need to know we matter. We need to know our partners will be there for us.

Here is the big dilemma we all face: "I can only see you if you are to be seen. I can only know you if you are to be known."

How accessible, responsive, and engaged are you and your partner? Do you reveal yourselves to one another, during the good times and the bad?

Give it some thought. Tune in and reach out. The risk just might be worth it!

## Want to Know the Secret to Long-Lasting Love?

Early in their relationship, Jordan felt she needed to share a painful part of her past with her partner, Quinn.

Sitting on a patio one sunny afternoon with a bottle of wine between them, Jordan shared in a shaky voice about an upsetting experience in her teens. She knew she had to share this story for their relationship to move forward honestly and authentically.

Quinn responded lovingly, and their relationship immediately grew closer. Julia knew she could trust Quinn with her most vulnerable self.

### What the research says

At her core, Jordan knew what Dr. Brene Brown writes about vulnerability: “We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.”

You’ve got it! Vulnerability is the secret to long-lasting love.

April Eldemire, LMFT, writes about [Three Reasons to Be Vulnerable in Your Relationship](#):

- **Vulnerability improves your relationship with yourself.** It took great courage for Jordan to share this deeply personal experience with Quinn. Each time you are vulnerable, you can heal yourself and boost your resilience.
- **Vulnerability helps establish trust with your partner.** Vulnerability is not just about sharing difficult memories. Perhaps it’s a simple fear, a recent experience that unsettled you, or your long-term dream for your life. Any time you share something personal, you establish mutual trust and caring.
- **Vulnerability strengthens your bond.** Quinn’s unconditional love and support bolstered their relationship. That afternoon on the patio took their relationship to a new level, transcending surface-level small talk.

### Key takeaways

A brave willingness to be vulnerable, combined with your partner’s absolute support and respect, is critical for any strong, long-lasting relationship...whether it’s a friendship or romantic partnership. Let’s dive in and get vulnerable!

“Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if we want to experience connection.”

-Dr. Brene Brown