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### Love That Lasts

Cupid's arrow, heart-shaped chocolates, long-stem red roses, a candlelit dinner...

Love is expressed in many ways. But love that lasts is built on more than packages with bows. Spending quality time together, listening attentively and showing support and encouragement to the ones you love are eternal signs of devotion.

Apart from our need for air and water, love is essential to our survival. Studies show that people with healthy, loving relationships live longer, and women in emotionally healthy relationships are less likely to develop serious physical problems. Research also shows that healthy, loving relationships may protect our brains from aging!

It's no wonder love is so important. Here are some tips to strengthen relationships with the ones you love:

#### Make Time To Be Together

In today's hectic world, it's easy to feel like you don't have enough time to be with the ones you love. But in reality, the most important people in your life deserve your attention more than anything else. If work and other demands are preventing you from spending quality time with family and friends, then it may be time to re-evaluate your priorities. You may be surprised how a little time together can strengthen your relationships.

Consider these time-saving tips:

- Make things happen instead of letting them happen to you. For example, schedule time in an appointment book if you have to. Write activities on the schedule even if it's something as simple as taking a walk together.
- Cut some corners. No one ever died of a dust ball. Maybe you don't have to clean the house every weekend. Your loved ones will appreciate the time you spend with them more than the time you spend with the vacuum cleaner.

Just remember what the studies show; people who spend time with others tend to be healthier and live longer than those who shelter themselves from relationships.

## Listen And Remember

Have you heard the saying, "You have two ears and one mouth. Use them in that proportion"? Listening takes skill and many don't realize how important it is - but it's critical to keeping a relationship healthy. A good listener will ask good questions, demonstrate his or her full attention, restate important points and respond with thoughtfulness.

Did you know that you can listen at about twice the speed the average person talks? Try using your listening time to think about:

- What's behind the words you're hearing? What's at the heart of this conversation?
- What's expected of me in this conversation?
- How do I make sense of this information?
- What new thing am I hearing?
- How can I help?

You'll be amazed at how often people simply want to be heard and understood. Practice these tips and watch your relationships grow!

## Encourage And Support

No matter what age, everyone needs encouragement. We all want to know that we're special and that we make a difference. Simple words of kindness and encouragement can go a long way to make such things known.

People who receive encouragement:

- Feel loved and become more open to loving others
- Feel valued and know that they matter
- Have improved self-esteem and confidence
- Accomplish more in everyday living

Love can be expressed in many ways. But the kind of love that lasts is shown by making time for others, being a good listener and offering support and encouragement.

# Communicating Effectively with Your Spouse

While romance might get a relationship started, good communication keeps it going. These healthy communication habits can help you strengthen your bonds with your spouse:

## Make intimacy a priority

With busy schedules and multiple demands, it's easy to let your need for intimate contact with your spouse slide; but intimacy strengthens a relationship like nothing else can. No matter how busy you are with work and family obligations, spend at least one hour of private time with your spouse every day. Even if you don't have time for romance, use the time to talk about the successes and frustrations of your day.

## Find a good time to talk about difficult subjects

When you have something difficult to talk about, check with your mate for a specific time to discuss it. Resist the temptation to talk when he or she walks in the door after a hard day at work. Try choosing a subject you want to discuss and both of you write about it for 10 minutes; then talk about it for 10 minutes. Make sure you stick to the time frame. If you need more time, agree on when you can talk about it again.

## Focus your concerns

Think about what you want to say before you begin to talk. With sensitive topics, it might be tempting to avoid talking about what's on your mind. Get right to the point and after you've stated your request, listen closely to your spouse's reply. Stay focused on finding solutions to problems rather than on emphasizing differences.

## Let both sides be heard

When you have a disagreement, remember that both of your needs are important. Use a firm and gentle tone of voice in stating what you need, why you need it and what you want your mate to do. However, try not to elevate your needs above your spouse's. Listen and show that you see things from your spouse's perspective.

## Be honest but not accusatory

It's easy to blame the other person when you're angry or hurt, but blaming only invites retaliation. Talk about your feelings instead. For instance, avoid saying "You ruined the plans again. You're always late." Instead, using "I" statements, say: "I'm very disappointed that you were late. I was counting on you to be home in time." This approach is less likely to provoke a defensive response and more likely to encourage an open discussion.

## Value your differences

Sometimes the differences in your temperaments and communication styles will be more evident than your similarities. When you feel this way, how and what you communicate to your spouse will determine how effectively you solve your problems. Appreciate your differences and you'll learn to work together better.

# Ways to Build Better Relationships

With busy schedules and multiple demands at home and work, it's easy to take your relationships for granted. But the quality of your relationships with your spouse and children is the foundation on which your family is built. Good communication takes time and teamwork. It's a process in which the whole family should become involved.

## Spend Time Together

The most important relationships in your life deserve your time and attention. If you feel that you're spending too much time on work and not enough with your family, it's time to re-evaluate your priorities:

- After you hang up your coat and put away your briefcase, dedicate your first 15 minutes at home to your children.
- Mark on the calendar part of each weekend to spend some private time with each child.
- Make a point to spend at least an hour alone with your spouse each day, no matter how busy you are with work and parenting responsibilities.

## Make Time to Discuss Problems

One of the first strategies to build and strengthen your family communication is to avoid letting aggravations accumulate. When frustrations are not vented, they can lead to unpleasant explosions that do no one any good.

Try setting up family meetings, perhaps once a week, as a time for open dialog. Each member of the family can use this time to get little annoyances off their chests. If someone feels resentful that they always do a particular household chore without any help, for example, this is a time to bring up their feelings.

## Have Fun Together

Strong family relationships are based on sharing all kinds of experiences. Make a point of planning fun activities your family can enjoy together, such as camping, bicycling and taking trips to the movies, museums and libraries.

## When You Argue, Do So Constructively

Arguments all too often turn into mudslinging events. Stick to the point and avoid dragging out old quarrels. Try to maintain a positive approach. If you have a legitimate concern, focus on it. Resist the temptation to bicker about things that have no bearing on the issue at hand. Also, be willing to give a little and compromise.

## Put Yourself in the Other Person's Shoes

Don't lose sight of the other person's perspective; learn to value it. Listen and acknowledge the other person's concerns, then discuss why you perceive the situation differently. Encourage that person to explain his or her feelings and make assurances that you want to understand his or her perspective. Then make an honest attempt to really listen.

## Accept Feelings; Avoid Judgment

Even if something seems ridiculous to you, it may be of genuine concern to the other party. Feelings are real, so take them seriously. In the areas where you have conflicts, work together to pinpoint the trouble spots and implement changes to correct them.

## Take Time to Be Together

It's easy to feel like you don't have enough time in a busy week to spend relaxing with your partner and children. But the most important relationships in your life deserve your time and attention. If work and other responsibilities are slicing into the time you spend with your family, it's time to re-evaluate your priorities and put more balance into your life.

You can reclaim "lost" bits of time by re-examining your values, prioritizing work obligations and using time management techniques for work and household chores. Make a point of using the time you've "saved" to strengthen your bonds with your spouse and kids.

Time has a funny way of expanding when you're with someone you care about. The clock seems to stop because you're so involved in the moment. Small blocks of time together can make a big difference in the quality of your relationships. So, even if you have to schedule your time together in tiny parcels, make the most of it.

### Time With Your Spouse

You'd be surprised how a little private time together in a new environment can enrich your relationship and give you both a new perspective on your busy lives. Get out your calendar and make a date with your spouse for the first free evening you can find. Plan to do something you haven't done in a long time. Make dates each month so you have something special to look forward to. Add a bit of spontaneity by surprising your partner with reservations at a favorite restaurant. And the next time you hire a baby sitter for a school conference, ask the sitter to stay a bit longer while you and your spouse go out for a walk or for dessert and coffee.

### Time With Your Kids

No matter how busy you are, your kids need your undivided time and attention on a regular basis. Spend your first 15 minutes at home listening to your children. Mark on the calendar part of each weekend for some private time with each child. Do something you both enjoy. Take each child to breakfast or lunch once a month to allow for solid one-to-one communication. Although you may feel too tired to toss a football around the backyard at the end of the day, you can connect with your kids by playing quiet games or asking them to tell you about their day. Enjoy the intimacy of your kids' nighttime rituals. Use bedtime to cuddle up and share a favorite book.

### Enrich Family Routines

You can make family errands more fun by bringing along the kids and topping off your expeditions with a stop for ice cream. Older children can help cut shopping time by taking part of the shopping list and meeting you at the cash register. Make meal times more pleasurable by turning off the television and focusing on conversation. Use the time to catch up on the day's events and reconnect with each family member.



## Supporting Loved Ones Through Difficult Times

Among the many types of losses that one can experience during a lifetime, the most devastating of all is the death of a loved one. There are simple ways you can show support to a friend, colleague or family member who has lost a loved one.

This loss can often leave a person feeling numb and unable to cope with life's responsibilities. But there are simple ways you can show support to a friend, colleague or family member who has lost a loved one. Consider these tips:

- Give your loved one space without forcing him or her to talk about their loss. Be sure to let them know that you're available when needed.
- Avoid clichés (i.e., "he lived a good long life," "she's in a better place"). While those thoughts may be true, they may not be helpful to your loved one at this moment.
- Even though it's difficult, make regular phone calls just to check in with your loved one.
- Allow your loved one to grieve in their own way. It's important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to mourn.
- Be sure to include loved ones in holiday celebrations at whatever level they can manage. Even if it's just for a brief time, time spent with family and friends can provide support and a much-needed respite.

If your loved one continues to grieve beyond a reasonable length of time, you may wish to seek help from a counselor.



## Why Should I Quit

You know that smoking is bad for you, but just how bad is it?

### What Smoking Does to You

Smoking causes many kinds of damage to your body. It can cause cell mutations that lead to lung, throat and other forms of cancer. It destroys alveoli - the tiny air sacs in our lungs that allow us to breathe - causing emphysema. And it inflames lung and bronchial tube linings, causing Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorders, such as chronic bronchitis. In short, whenever smoke touches living cells it harms them. So even if you're a pipe or cigar smoker and don't inhale, you're increasing your risk of lip, mouth and tongue cancers. Last, but not least, smoking constricts and clogs arteries, leading to high blood pressure and increased risk of strokes and heart attacks.

### Your Risk of Illness

All of this damage gives rise to some frightening statistics. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the average male smoker dies 13.2 years sooner, and the average female 14.5 years sooner, than a non-smoker of the same sex! And smoking-related diseases cause about 430,000 deaths in America each year. Cigarette smoking alone causes about 30% of cancer deaths. Smoking is also responsible for 87 percent of lung cancer cases and most cases

of emphysema and chronic bronchitis. But the biggest cause of death among smokers is heart disease. Smokers have double the risk of dying from a heart attack as non-smokers.

## Harm to Others

Smoking also harms others, including your children. The number of deaths each year caused by passive smoking could be as high as 40,000. Smoking increases the risk of asthma and other lung problems in children who are exposed to it. And research shows that the children of smokers are more likely to become smokers themselves. So if you smoke and have children, you are increasing their chances of becoming smokers too. If you smoke when pregnant, your baby will likely have a lower birth weight, and a higher risk of birth defects and other respiratory problems.

## The Financial Cost

Smoking is expensive, both for you and the country. If you smoke a pack a day at \$4 a pack, it costs you over \$1,400 a year. If you smoke for 50 years, that adds up to over \$70,000 (at current values) over a lifetime! Smoking also costs the U.S. around \$97.2 billion a year in healthcare costs and lost productivity.

## The Social Cost

If all this isn't enough, smoking also ages your skin, yellows your teeth and fingers, and makes your breath and clothes smell bad. Most indoor public places and offices don't allow it anymore, and most non-smokers say they wouldn't date a smoker. Perhaps it once looked sexy when Lauren Bacall blew smoke in Humphrey Bogart's face, but only because we were watching in black and white and smell-o-vision hadn't been invented. Let's face it, most people just don't find smoking attractive anymore. So if that was one of the reasons you started smoking, it's time to reconsider.

## It's Never Too Late

Incredible as it sounds, some of the benefits of quitting smoking start within minutes of your last cigarette. After just 20 minutes your blood pressure and pulse rate drop. Your risk of a heart attack decreases after only a day. After a year your excess risk of coronary heart disease decreases to half that of a smoker. And between five to 15 years your stroke risk becomes as low as if you've never smoked!

If you've smoked for many years, some lung damage will be irreversible. But 10 years after quitting your risk of lung cancer can be half that of someone who still smokes. It really is never too late to stop. Even smokers who quit in their fifties add, on average, two to three years to their lives.

(Sources: American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Centers for Disease Control)



## Ten Time-Saving Tips

If you find that it takes much too long to do the things you have to do, use these tips to save time you can devote to things you enjoy doing.

- **Delegate household chores** to your spouse and children. Pick chores that are appropriate for each child's age and ability. Ask children which chores they prefer.
- **Plan ahead.** Do things the night before. Encourage children to prepare their backpacks for school before they go to bed. Collect everything you need for the next day and put it in the car or by the door before going to bed.
- **Freeze meals ahead of time.** Make double portions of your favorite dishes. Use leftover turkey for casseroles, soups and stir-fries. Make and freeze a week's worth of sandwiches at a time. Take them out of the freezer at breakfast and they'll be defrosted by noon.
- **Enlist outside help for yard work.** If your kids are too young to rake leaves or water the lawn, hire an older neighborhood child to do the job. Be sure to clearly explain what's expected.
- **Buy birthday, anniversary and special events cards in advance.** Pre-address and sign them. Mark dates in a calendar so you'll remember when to send them.
- **Ask a teenager or older family member to plan and prepare the evening meal one night a week.** Encourage them to use imaginative menus to make the job more fun and add variety to your diet.
- **Use work breaks to review your daily to-do list.** Crossing off completed or unnecessary items will help you feel more relaxed.
- **Plan ahead for at-home emergencies.** Keep an extra key with the neighbors. Post a list of essential phone numbers, such as those for relatives, doctors and neighbors, next to the phone. Compile phone numbers of backup baby sitters and child care providers.
- **Create a neighborhood car pool** for carting kids to games, school events and lessons.
- **Consolidate bill paying.** Stash bills in one place when they arrive. Pick a time once a month to pay bills that are due.



## Identity Theft

Identity Theft is one of the nation's fastest growing crimes, and it can be both financially and emotionally devastating. Resolving identity theft is almost always difficult, time consuming and stressful. The legal and financial tools can help you manage the situation and ease the burden it brings.

Getting Started is Easy!  
Call your EAP for more information.

Call MHN today for information on how to protect yourself!

If you have been victimized, we can help. Call right away to speak with a fraud resolution specialist who can advise you on how to place fraud alerts, freeze credit, file police reports and conduct other activities necessary to resolve fraud.