

Lost that Lovin' Feeling? Try Gratitude!

Let's face it, relationships are challenging. Sure, they may start out with fireworks. We spend hours talking and texting and slipping out for late night booty calls. But eventually the newness wears off and the honeymoon is over. Rather than relishing the time we spend with our partners, we take them for granted. When we take off our rose-colored glasses, we start to notice ways in which our partner is less than perfect. We notice their love handles. We begin to get annoyed with habits that we once either tolerated or ignored. And, if we're not careful, even sex can lose some of its luster. Add a dash or a dollop of stress into the mix it's easy to forget about all the little things that helped us fall in love with our partners in the first place.

Fortunately, we can get some of the magic back by something as simple as being grateful to our partners and for them*. Sara Algoe and her colleagues found that when one partner said that they felt more grateful to or for their partner, their partner reported feeling better about the relationship. They also found grateful couples to be more satisfied with their relationship and to feel closer to each other. Similarly, Amie Gordon and her colleagues found that people who were grateful for their partners were less likely to break up with them.

According to Gordon and her colleagues, when we feel moments of gratitude for our partners, we value them more, listen to them more attentively, and are more responsive to their needs. They found that these behaviors made the partners who were listened and responded to feel more appreciated and in turn, felt more grateful as well.

Gratitude also helps couples reduce the conflict they have around household chores and paid work. This is great news because one of the major things couples fight over is the perception that one partner is not doing their share. Jess Alberts and Angela Trethewey found that gratitude helps reduce conflict in several ways. First, gratitude combats the tendency to take the work our partner does around the house and in the workforce for granted. Grateful partners actually recognize that what their partner is doing, whether it's vacuuming, mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, doing the laundry or holding down a stressful job that has benefits and helps pay the bills, is in part a gift. When one partner perceives their partner's efforts as a gift, rather than just their "job" or something that they would do for themselves anyway, they are more likely to offer "gifts" of their own by doing more household tasks. Second, partners who feel appreciated also tend to feel less resentment over the division of labor and happier with their relationships.

The first step towards cultivating gratitude in your relationship is to start paying attention to all the little things your partner does for you. If this is hard, think about all the things you'd have to do if your partner was gone. If you notice what your partner does for you, you will be more likely to be grateful for their efforts. Second, if you feel grateful, say it. Don't expect your partner to read your mind. Even if they already know you are grateful, it feels good to be acknowledged. When you are expressing gratitude, be specific. A generic, "Thanks," doesn't mean much. Tell them what you are grateful for. "Thanks for taking out the trash" lets them know that you appreciate what they did. Third, be genuine. If your partner cooks something for you - perhaps roasted brussel sprouts- that makes you gag, they probably noticed your horror at the plate. Don't rave over those toasted little heads. But you can thank them for trying to cook something for you. (This will also increase the likelihood that they cook for you again!) Finally, take time every so often to remember the qualities your partner has that led you to fall in love with them in the first place.

*If you are in an abusive relationship, please note that gratitude will not stop your partner from saying or doing hurtful things to you. If you are being abused, the best thing you can do is call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224 to get the support and help you need.

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