

# Finding the Time and Space to Be Together

By Janelle Durham, MSW. Parent Educator. GoodDaysWithKids.com

## **Take time every day to connect as a couple**

Even a few minutes a day can make a big difference to a relationship. Carolyn Pirak, from Bringing Baby Home recommends: When you separate each morning, spend at least two minutes saying goodbye. When you reunite, spend 20 minutes talking about your days. Take five minutes a day to express appreciation and 8 minutes to show affection. ([www.parentmap.com/article/make-time-for-your-partner](http://www.parentmap.com/article/make-time-for-your-partner))

## **8 minute date ideas**

It may be hard to predict when you'll find time for showing affection, but you can commit to seizing those moments when they come. Have a list of ideas for "8 minute dates." That way, when a moment comes, you don't have to be creative. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ⌚ Put on a piece of music, and dance for one song.
- ⌚ Rub each other's necks for a few minutes each. End with a full body hug.
- ⌚ Tell your partner what you most appreciate about him/her.
- ⌚ Step outside, and look at the moon and the stars.
- ⌚ Snuggle up on the couch, and talk about a happy memory.
- ⌚ Slow down. Just take a few deep breaths, and stop running frantically.
- ⌚ Go for a short walk – talk about your dreams together.

## **Date Nights**

Prioritize finding time for you as a couple. Ideally, this is a "real date" (remember those? It's time with just the two of you, away from other responsibilities, and other interruptions). It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Just a chance to be together, really listen to each other, really see the other person, and remember why you chose to spend your lives together. Celebrate being a couple!

(If you can't make a full date night work, try to set aside one evening a week where you commit to squeezing in an hour of date time at home – maybe after kids are in bed for the night.)

To maximize the benefits: Spend time talking about what your expectations are, and what each of you most needs from the time together. Knowing each other's priorities helps ensure they're met.

Sometimes as parents, the best laid plans for a date can fall apart (you have a sick child, screaming baby, you're too tired to do what you planned...) Have a plan for contingencies: if X happens, what will we do? Have alternatives planned. Even if the plan fails, it may feel good to have at least tried!

## **Re-discovering your sex life**

As parents of young children, your libido may be down, you may have a hard time figuring out how to fit in a sex life around children who have no respect for the privacy of your room, or you may be just too tired to think about sex! Here are some hints for easing your way into lovemaking.

- Start slow: try starting with cuddling, snuggles, hugs, or massage. Try not to feel any pressure to take it further for a while.
- Find other ways to express love for each other, in love languages you each hear best.
- If you're ready for everything, and your partner isn't ready for anything, then masturbation may help you meet some of your needs.
- "Quickies". If it's hard to find time or energy for a whole love-making "session", try: a little oral sex, some fondling, or even giving an intense kiss with your *full* attention.
- If your child sleeps in your room, or your bed, you may not be able to make love there. Remember, there are many other rooms in your house!

## **Love Languages**

In Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages, he argues that different people have different "languages" they use to express love, and that we "hear" love best when it's spoken in our language. Which one of these sounds most like how your partner hears love from you? Which describes how you hear love? What do you speak?

- *Physical Touch*: Feels most loved when being touched. Feels most rejected if touch is absent/ unkind.
- *Words of Affirmation*: Drinks in encouragement, praise, validation for concerns. Sensitive to criticism.
- *Acts of Service*: Wants active support with concrete tasks. Feels unsupported when you don't pitch in.
- *Gifts*: Loves any special little thing done just for them. Will be upset if you skip a gift-giving occasion.
- *Quality Time*: Wants your Presence - time together, spent talking and connecting, doing activities together. Feels unsupported if you cancel planned time with them.

Discuss with your partner. Are you right about their language? What do they think is your language? Sometimes partners discover that if one is feeling unloved, it's not that the other wasn't trying hard to communicate love, they were just shouting in the wrong language.

## **Use Love Languages to Create Priorities for Together Time**

If you only have so much time and energy available, understanding love languages can help you to prioritize how to spend it.

*Physical Touch*: If this is your partner's language, try: stroking their hair, holding their hand, massage, hugging, kissing, rubbing their feet... Be in physical contact whenever possible. Spend time snuggling when possible.

*Words of Affirmation*: Encouragement and praise are vital to supporting your partner. Acknowledging all the hard work they are doing, and validating the way they are taking care of the family, work and day to day tasks is very helpful.

*Gifts*: Surprise your partner with symbols of affection, and thoughtful little details. Bring home their favorite snack. Take pictures of the children to share with them at the end of the day. Leave love notes around the house. Buy a flower at the grocery store. It doesn't have to be extravagant and expensive. Any little "gift" that is chosen especially for them will speak your love loud and clear. Never forget to get a gift for special occasions!

*Acts of Service*: This partner wants active support with household responsibilities. Help with doing laundry, washing dishes, running errands, making a to-do list together and taking on tasks. Ask them which tasks most need to be done, and focus on those priorities. Don't forget to do tasks that you have promised to be responsible for.

*Quality Time*: This partner needs your Presence and Attention. They do *not* want you getting home late from work (even if you were stopping to get a gift), or spending time doing tasks when you could be together. They want someone by their side, supporting just by being there and being attuned to their needs. Arrange for a babysitter and go out on a date!