

Rekindle your Relationship with Mindfulness

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Do you recall the beginning of your relationship, when you first fell in love? What is it that made those butterflies in your stomach fade away? What happened along the way that made you lose those moments of staring into each other's eyes and not getting enough? Try to remember those wonderful moments and describe your behavior. Recall your partner's behavior at that time. Is it still the same?

Too often in a long-term relationship partners stop the very behaviors that connected them with one another and not because they stop loving each other but because they begin to take the other one for granted. Sensual and gratifying behaviors are lost, such as looking deeply into one another's eyes, Mouth to mouth kisses, sexual innuendo, offering your partner focused attention, active listening, random compliments, gifts, etc.

What is it that you have stopped doing? What has your partner stopped doing? What behaviors would you like to rekindle in your relationship? How can Mindfulness help you rekindle your relationship?

Mindfulness is a practice of awareness in the present moment. Dr. John Gottman, relationship expert and researcher, describes successful long-term unions as a "string of pearls" made up of mindful moments of connection and appreciation. The happiest and healthiest couples do not necessarily spend a lot of time in conversation but they have a myriad of ways of mindfully connecting with one another in the present moment.

Walton and Kathryn were a couple who maintained a mindful connection for 60 years despite financial hardship, two jobs, and four children. Their laughter was their prosperity during hard times. Their joy and pleasure in one another was the wealth in poverty. Their love was the antidote to sorrow.

Their daughter, Jan, shared that she thought all parents went to sleep laughing and sharing affection at night because her bedroom shared a common wall with her parents'. Joy and laughter are forms of mindful

connection to one another in the present moment.

When Walton was dying, he told a group of us who stopped by the story of how he and Kathryn had a hurried wedding so he could go off to the Second World War and that she was still his sweetheart after 60 years. She sat beside him and beamed. Walton and Kathryn are an inspirational couple who maintained a mindful connection over time. We have all seen such couples but what lessons can we apply to our relationships?

In order to have a relationship as successful as theirs, mindful training is a plus. Mindful training includes the practice of focusing on the breath to calm down and experience the present moment, and deliberately sending compassion to self and others.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to manifest affection towards one another. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Just mindfully thinking about your partner with feelings of loving-kindness can boost the pleasure chemical dopamine and lower stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol. You get a kind of pleasurable chemical shower.

One of the most effective acts is mindfully kissing on the mouth. That is because lips are incredibly sensitive. "Of the 12 or 13 cranial nerves that affect cerebral functions, five are at work when we kiss". (Scientific American). In addition, kissing on the mouth allows for an exchange of saliva that can help boost the immune system of both partners. Human beings are wired for connection so practice mindfully bringing yourself into the present moment to enjoy all the sensations generated an intimate kiss. In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to share affection daily. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Sex therapist, David Schnarch, recommends a type of mindful intimate connection called "eyes open" sex so couples maintain prescient awareness of one another during the sexual experience.

PRACTICES

Physical affection and sex offer a myriad of opportunities to practice mindfulness with your partner:

As you kiss on the lips, notice how your body feels as you attend to the sensations of the present moment.

Remember what behaviors you had when you first fell in love and mindfully repeat those behaviors.

Mindfully look into your partner's eyes with compassion for his/her struggles.

Find ways to connect mindfully with your partner in the present moment through laughter, mutual memories, walks, and shared affection. This becomes a positive bank account of emotions so, when times are hard, you have these connections.

Initiate sexual contact and use all your senses to experience the moment. Look into your partner's eyes, play special music, savor the touch of skin, smell scented candles or massage oil. Always return to the sensations of the present moment.

It is possible to mindfully cultivate a compassionate awareness of your partner by following these steps:

Sit quietly for five minutes at a time and pay attention to your breathing. Since mindfulness is a practice, it is better to do this for longer. However, short segments can also be helpful.

Feel the breath moving into your heart with kindness and care and repeat: "May I be free of suffering. May I be at peace". Allow yourself to be healed. Continue repeating "May I be healed. May I be free of suffering" with each breath.

Imagine loving kindness with each breath. Continue breathing as you focus on your loving-kindness and relating to yourself with tenderness while sending well-being into your mind and body. Repeat for a number of breaths: "May I find my greatest joy. May I heal into my true nature".

Now bring your mind to your partner and imagine that you can send them warmth and kindness. With each breath think, "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace.". Continue the breathing of connection and

this wish for their happiness and wholeness, repeating: "May you be free from suffering. May you know your deepest joy, your greatest peace.". Continue and picture your partner's presence with a wish for their healing and deepest joy.

To rekindle your relationship, mindfully pay attention and treat your partner as you treated him/her in the beginning. Don't take him/her for granted and most important: enjoy moments spent together, living it in the present. This is what mindfulness is about!

About the Author:

Dr. Linda Miles is a leading expert on relationships and mindfulness. She is a psychotherapist, author, media expert and speaker. She has studied and worked in her field of counseling psychology for over 30 years and often speaks about mindfulness, stress reduction, mental health and relationships. Dr. Miles has taken advanced courses in Mindfulness through UCLA and Duke University Integrative Medicine. Her latest book is "Change Your Story Change Your Brain", a guide to living more fully in the present moment. She can be reached at www.drlindamiles.com or followed on [Twitter](#).