

20 Minutes a Day is Preventative Maintenance for Relationships

Adapted from an article by Miriam Kearney

Have you ever wondered where the spark went? Did things seem to change after you said, "I do"? So often in our relationships our "cups" become empty from meeting the physical, emotional needs of others. There is little time and space for self let alone the time, energy and creativity needed to nurture our relationship with our partner. This is especially true in the early years of parenting. The exciting news is that this is very normal and you can get that flame back, even stronger and better than before.

Focus on our primary relationship is actually a vital source of energy. We have high expectations of ourselves and it is impossible to keep giving when we are emotionally dry and empty. Everything becomes overwhelming; it's all too hard.

Trying to sustain a loving relationship without making time to nurture each other and the relationship is like driving a car without oil. Eventually it breaks down.

When couples give each other and their relationship even 20 minutes a day of undivided attention, amazing things happen. Just like the rituals we have for special occasions, this 20 minutes becomes sacred and can have its own structure too. Maybe you meet on the couch (without the TV), on the back porch, or at the kitchen table. For 20 minutes you give each other your undivided attention.

It's not a lot of time, yet by making your relationship top priority at least once a day, you keep the relationship working smoothly. Think of it as preventative maintenance for your relationship engine.

I often teach couples a ritual called The Daily Temperature Reading. In this ritual each person takes turns being the speaker and listener. There are 5 types of information that can be shared in this time. Since the entire ritual is intended to be completed in 20 minutes that means, of course, that all sharing is brief. The brevity can make the ritual appealing even to those who are generally uncomfortable speaking about themselves. The five areas to be covered are (1) appreciation of each other (2) new information your partner needs or would want to know (3) realizations about your own behaviour or your self (4) complaints with a request for change and (5) hopes dreams and wishes.

Here's an example of a Temperature Reading I did recently with my husband:

1. (appreciation) I appreciate that you put the clothes in the dryer last night when I forgot them in the washer. I also appreciate that you did it without saying anything.
2. (new information) Your sister called and said that your niece and husband were coming to see us on July 8th but I don't know whether they will spend the night or not yet.
3. (realizations) I realize that I've been worried about our money situation but I haven't been talking to you about it. I would like to have a money talk tonight if you're willing.
4. (complaint with request for change) I don't like seeing the bathmat hanging over the shutter to dry. I would prefer it if you would use the towel rod on the back of the door.
5. (hopes, wishes and dreams) I'd like to set up a summer camp somewhere on our property for us so we can sleep out of doors occasionally. I realize I miss camping yet I don't really want to go away.

The Daily Temperature Reading is intended to provide information. It is not intended to serve as a serious conflict-resolving tool —its purpose is to prevent misunderstandings.