

HOW TO
MAKE LOVE
ALL THE TIME



AND

ENJOY SEX TOO

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-- and --

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHORS

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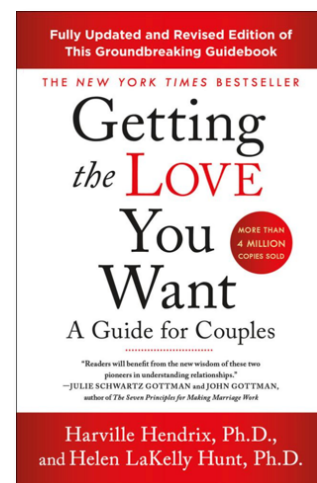
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How to Make Love All the Time and Enjoy Sex Too

by Harville Hendrix Ph.D. and Helen LaKelly Hunt Ph.D.

What if you could make love with your partner all the time? What if enjoyable sex was a perpetual part of your relationship? To some couples, that level of romance and passion may sound like an absurd concept. However, it's entirely possible when you view "making love" and "having sex" from the right perspective.

In today's culture, the phrase "making love" typically refers to "having sex." However, there are actually big differences between these phrases. Making love is about so much more than just having sex. We refer to "making love" as building a relationship where each partner feels safe, open communication is fostered, and both parties embrace the differences of their partner. In that positive environment, "having sex" is a natural by-product that enhances a relationship even more. Therefore, learning how to truly make love is the key to enjoyable sex.

Unfortunately, there are many couples who miss out on this reality. That's because they're too focused on "having sex" rather than learning how to "make love." The focus on sex leads to numerous complaints and a relationship dynamic lacking the fuel to make passion last.

With these problems in mind, we designed this resource to help you avoid those issues in your relationship. After being married for over 30 years, we believe you can make love all the time and enjoy sex too! But, you must remove the focus on sex and place your focus on enhancing the relationship. Then, the enjoyable sex will regularly occur.

However, sexual frustrations don't just disappear on their own. Many couples aren't able to concentrate on enhancing the relationship until their frustrations in the bedroom are addressed. So, the next section delves into the common sexual problems that most couples face. Then, we'll explain how to rekindle romance and make love a constant part of being a couple.

Common Sexual Complaints Among Couples

In our counseling experience, sexual complaints surfaced in about 60% of the couples who came for help with their relationship. While the sexual revolution made it possible for couples to talk more openly about their sexuality, it has removed few of their frustrations. In fact, it has made it possible for more complaints to be aired!

With increasing permission for women to enjoy their bodies and for men to express their feelings, sexual complaints now cross gender lines and break the cultural stereotypes. And these common complaints also are experienced in gay and lesbian relationships. When we put them all together, here are the 10 most frequent complaints couples express about sex:

1. "You Never Seem to Want to Make Love."

This complaint is about sexual frequency. The overt issue is about different levels of desire, rather than frigidity or impotence. However, there is a hidden meaning behind the problem related to not feeling loved, rather than getting enough sex. That is why the emphasis is placed on the word "never." The person making the statement is doing so to produce an effect, rather than cite a fact.

2. "You Take So Long."

Usually a complaint of men, it refers to the differential in time it takes some men versus some women to have an orgasm. Men seem to be quicker, more genitally focused, and less involved in the climax than women. A woman generally seems more involved bodily and emotionally. When her climax comes, it is more of a total physical and emotional experience.

3. "You Never Ask."

This complaint often historically looks like a gender issue of male initiative and female unresponsiveness, but it isn't. More wives are complaining about lack of male initiative (which frequently evolves into sharing their underlying fear). For example, Anna tearfully said to Arthur, "We have sex very little, and you never ask me. I begin to feel like you don't want me, that you don't like me. Then I wonder what you do for sex. Are you having an affair? Have you lost interest? I am beginning to feel sexually unattractive. I have all kinds of questions."

4. "You Don't Like the Way I Do It."

Of all the complaints about sex that can bruise the male ego, criticism of his technique hurts the most. But sometimes, from the female point of view, this is the area where improvement is needed. Men can be emotionally vulnerable in this area because they are often hooked on performance. From childhood, through parenting and cultural dictums, they have been taught to be effective, to make things happen, but not how to communicate and relate on the feeling level.

Some men have programmed beliefs about a woman's sexual response, and they follow the program instead listening to her feedback. Other men cannot distinguish between their own feelings and those of their partner. They think the other person enjoys whatever they enjoy and cannot understand a contrary report. (In fact, this is part of the human condition for both women and men: the inability to break the assumption that "what feels good to me, must feel good to you" but more about that later.)

5. "We Only Have Sex When You Want It."

This complaint primarily relates to an issue with power and control. It is a game played by both sexes in which one is the persecutor and the other is the victim. One partner may seem constantly available for sex. The other might use sex as a bartering chip. This can be about differing levels of libido but frequently partners interpret as a form of punishment or control.

6. "You're Not Interested in My Satisfaction."

Although this is a gender-free complaint, it is usually made by women whose sexual partners ejaculate pre-maturely and lose interest in their needs. Some men seem to have

hair-trigger responses to sexual stimulation and a short attention span once their needs are satisfied. Other men seem uneducated in female sexual psychology and have little sensitivity to female orgasm.

However, it needs to be understood that pre-mature ejaculation is a personal matter; it seldom merits the rating of a pathology. Orgasm is pre-mature if it occurs before you want it to or before your partner is ready also. It can become a problem if it is made into a problem. It is, in fact, a difference in the pace of arousal between what you want and what you get or between you and your partner.

7. “You Never Want Intimacy...You Just Want Sex.”

One partner may seem unconnected to their feelings as a result of their childhood experiences. It is hard for them to share their innermost thoughts in the privacy of the bedroom. The other partner might want to connect emotionally before they connect physically (cuddling, talking intimately, having non-sexual fun together.) Sex for some is an event while for others, it is an experience that includes an event.

8. “You Want Sex All the Time.”

This is mainly a female complaint, although with increased permission to own their sexuality, women report more frequency in sexual desire. It counter-balances the male complaint: you never want sex except when you want it. It isn't the case that men want sex all the time, but the ever-present high quantities of testosterone and freedom from cyclical-hormonal interruptions gives them a desire frequency level different from the female. Needing closeness and body contact without permission to ask for it, men tend to use sex for closeness. The combination of these two factors makes them appear to have incessant sexual needs. The female's complaint often has a hidden meaning: you just want sex; you don't want me.

9. “After We Make Love, You Just Roll Over and Go to Sleep.”

This is a variant of the "no intimacy" complaint. One partner tends to be focused on the event and not the relationship. When the action is over, they have other things to do. Some partners lack the good sense to experience the "after-glow" of sex. Just like "foreplay" is the appetizer of what is to come, "after-play" is the dessert of sex. Some partners, for whom sex is more an experience than an event, appreciate savoring the after effects more than others. Vivien's complaint with Ben is typical, "After you have your orgasm, you aren't interested in me anymore. If we make love at night, I soon hear your snore. If it's daylight, you get up to have a cigarette or something. I feel used and left alone."

10. “You Have No Imagination.”

This is a consequence of the differences between partners: one is more instrumental, the other more affective. Sometimes, the complaint is not about a romantic setting but the lack of imaginative technique overall.

Based on the 10 common complaints about sex we just described, how many of those issues do you feel affect your relationship? Have you made any of those remarks to your partner? If so, you're not alone. Let's talk about how to overcome these complaints and make love-making a more enjoyable experience.

How to Put the Zip Back in Sex

1. Communicate

Most problems that couples have about sex is a result of poor communication. Even when the problem is more serious, it must be addressed or solved with effective communication. Communication occurs at three levels.

First is the level of Mirroring. When you partner is talking, you need to be like a flat mirror--not convex or concave--and actively reflect what your partner is saying until you are sure the message has been transmitted. A mirror response is something like this, "So, if I got it, you said that you get frustrated when I don't spend some romantic time with you before we have sex. You would like some stroking and tenderness, some emotional foreplay. Am I hearing this correctly?" Followed by an invitation to share more (there is usually more!), "Is there more about that?"

The second level of communication is to put yourself in the shoes of your partner and see it from his or her point of view. You have to validate the other person's experience. When your partner is talking about sex, this is of vital importance. An example of a validating response is this: "That makes sense to me. I can see that you would feel more sexual if you felt emotionally close to me before intercourse."

The third level of communication is empathy. This is an attempt to feel the feelings of your partner when they are talking about a specific subject. Empathy sounds like this, "I can imagine that you feel angry when I just want sex and don't show an interest in you first. It must feel like I just want your body. Is that what you are feeling?"

This three step process we call Imago Dialogue and it is a way to stop the monologues that are going on in our own heads and move towards dialogue where we actually take the time to listen and understand each other, ultimately creating a connecting experience for both the listener and the speaker.

2. Identify the Pattern in Your Frustrations

Most of us are not frustrated in many different ways, but the frustrations we have occur over and over again. It's important to identify the pattern in your frustrations, so you can deal with that rather than with individual frustrations. Make a list of all your frustrations, then study them and notice the similar ones. Cluster all the similar ones together and keep up this condensation process until you can reduce them all to no less than four frustrations. Now you have the pattern. Now, a difficult next step. Frustrations are wishes in disguise. And under repetitive frustrations are fears (usually carried over from our early childhood experiences). Look at your repetitive frustrations and see if you can discern an underlying fear and wish. For example, if a recurring frustration is "you want sex all the time", the fear might be "I am not loved" and the desire might be "I want to feel loved by you all the time." Identifying the pattern and the fear and desire underneath begins to set the stage for the next tip.

3. Make Time to Talk

You may want to ask your partner to make a list of his frustrations and cluster them also. Tell your partner you would like an appointment to discuss your love-making. Take a

“minor” frustration and share the underlying fear and desire (it’s important to start with something minor – something that doesn’t hold a lot of “charge” to it). Limit the session to 30 minutes, giving each person 15 minutes. If you don't finish, make another appointment. Be sure the time you set will be protected from more pressing activities or other people.

Make doubly sure it is not just before or right after sex – and definitely not during it. When you talk, use the Dialogue process outlined in point number one mentioned earlier. When you share your fears and desires, you can begin to ask for behavior changes and co-create solutions. Keep this point in mind: You nor your partner can make large changes immediately. Your goal should be small changes made regularly over a long period of time. Be patient.

4. Make Time to Make Love

To improve your sex life, you must make time to make love. Most complaints about the quality and frequency of love making comes from exhaustion. We are often too busy and too tired to make love. You may resist this because it lacks spontaneity; it smacks too much of an appointment. To get over that, just recall that most significant things occur because an appointment was made. You can be spontaneous after you get into bed. When you make an appointment to make love, keep it. Nothing dims sexual passion more than disappointment.

5. Stretch Into Your Partner’s Needs

Most of us feel that if we don't do things our way, we betray ourselves and become someone else. But, this erroneous perspective misses the fact that once we are willing to experiment with our partner's desires, we double our skills and enrich our experience. All of us marry someone whose complementarity offers us an opportunity to enlarge ourselves.

Aside from physical or emotional abuse, nothing two consenting adult partners want or can imagine is harmful. Your partner’s desires are an opportunity for you to grow in areas that you have probably not developed. When experimentation in love-making is viewed in this way, sex can become a growth experience. Remember, take small steps. When they are added up, they can lead to remarkable achievements.

6. Clear Out the Negative Feelings

It is not possible for negative and positive feelings to go through the same neural pathways. If you are harboring unexpressed anger or resentments, be sure to use the communication exercise above to discharge the negative feelings before you have sex. If you keep the negative feelings, eventually you will kill your desires. Even if you can make love with unexpressed negative feelings, you will risk marring the experience with oversensitivity or hostility. An important, and necessary, tip is to use “I” messages (*I feel, I want, I need*) and avoid “you” messages (*you always, you never*). Blame and criticism immediately sets up a flight or fight response.

7. Get Enough Rest

There are a host of research studies that point to the lack of restful sleep in America. Financial stress, extended work hours, family obligations, poor eating habits, lack of exercise, increased use of technology and social media, all contribute to a sleep-deprived culture. The emotional and physical costs of too little sleep are staggering. If your complaints are about frequency and quality, which is what most couples fuss about, you

should check your sleep patterns. Some couples report that their best sex is during the latter part of their vacation, once they have relaxed. Take a tip from that idea and imagine what your sex life could be like with enough rest. This may mean that you will have to change your habits, go to bed early, shut off the TV and laptop within an hour of bedtime, or make love in the morning or earlier in the evening. Or co-create with your partner some creative rituals that will help increase sleep while prepping for more intimacy – warm, candlelit baths, one-on-one time to talk during breakfast, 15-minutes of walking the dog together every evening.

8. Examine Your Sex Messages

Like many other aspects of life, sex is conditioned by our experiences in childhood. One of the most pervasive messages given by parents in this culture has to do with guilt about pleasure. The focus of this message is on sex. You might want to list all the beliefs you have about sex. Try to recall what you were told in childhood? Is there a relationship between these messages and your sexual complaints or the complaints of your partner? Do your messages allow you to have pleasure? After you have examined them, see if there are any beliefs you want to change. You as an adult can be in charge of your sex life. Without such an examination, you may be following the instructions of your parents or other significant adults.

9. Accept Each Other's Differences

One fundamental truth we all have to face is that our partners are not us and they are different from us. Differences exist because of gender distinctions, childhood experiences, cultural messages and genetic makeup. Rather than be threatened or frustrated by your partner's differences, explore them, enjoy them, and allow them to enlarge your experience and your view of reality. This is the most fundamental way to grow in a relationship. And we believe it is one of the unconscious purposes in a committed love relationship.

10. Be Creative

There is no right way to make love. As long as both parties are consenting adults and experience genuine pleasure in the activity, anything goes. Sex is nature's gift. While nature's primary function in sex was to insure the survival of the race, its secondary purpose was the enhancement of pleasure. Pleasure is good for you. It improves your physical health and your emotional balance. Pleasure is the experience of full aliveness.

One of the most accessible ways to experience the sensation of full aliveness is through great sex. Let your imagination roam freely. One way to enhance your creativity is to share in each other's fantasies. If you have no fantasies, make one up and share it. This effort alone will improve the quality of your love making and bring to it the element of romance. Your sexuality is yours, claim it, own it, enjoy it. Not to do so is unnatural and anti-nature.

11. Look at Sex as a Spiritual Experience

In our culture, sex has been given negative press by religious traditions for many centuries. This problem has created a distortion about the spiritual dimension of sex. In all religious traditions, the spiritual has been understood as the experience of increased aliveness, a sense of oneness and unity. When sex is seen as overcoming separation and uniting two people at a deep emotional and physical level, it becomes a means of spiritual experience. Making sex a spiritual act requires the removal of negativity, the sharing of your emotions, and the joining of your bodies and hearts.

These eleven points can make a big difference towards improving sex with your partner. Take time to work through each idea separately. Change will occur as you replace the complaints with new behaviors.

However, keep in mind that addressing sexual complaints is only part of “making love all the time.” To achieve that level of intimacy, your focus as a couple must move to a deeper need than just having better sex.

Create a Zone of Safety

Once a couple has made a commitment to work on their relationship, the next logical step is to help them become allies, not enemies. It’s fruitless to take two people who are angry with each other and try to lead them along a path of spiritual and psychological growth—they would spend too much time trying to knock each other off the road. In order to make the surest and fastest progress toward their relationship vision, they need to become friends and helpmates.

But how is this going to happen? How can couples put an end to their power struggle when they haven’t had the opportunity to resolve their fundamental differences? We found a solution to this dilemma in our studies of the behavioral sciences. We learned that we could influence the way a couple feels about each other by helping them artificially reconstruct the conditions of romantic love. When two people treat each other the way they did in happier times, they begin to identify each other as a source of pleasure once again, which makes them more willing to take part in growing their relationship.

Caring Behaviors

In his book, *Helping Couples Change: A Social Learning Approach to Marital Therapy*, psychologist Richard Stuart presents an exercise for couples that helps them feel more loving toward each other simply by engaging in more loving behaviors. Called “Caring Days,” the exercise instructs couples to write down a list of positive, specific ways their partners can please them.

For example, one partner might write down: “I would like you to massage my shoulders for fifteen minutes while we watch television.” Or “I would like you to bring me breakfast in bed on Sunday morning.” The partners are to grant each other a certain number of these caring behaviors a day, no matter how they feel about each other. Stuart discovered that the exercise generated “significant changes in the details of the couple’s daily interaction during the first seven days of therapy, a very firm foundation upon which to build subsequent suggestions for change.”

To see whether or not this behavioral approach actually worked, we decided to try it out on Harriet and Dennis Johnson. We chose the Johnsons because they were as unhappy with

each other as any couple in our practice. One of Harriet's main anxieties was that Dennis was going to leave her. In a desperate effort to hold his interest, she flirted conspicuously with other men. To her dismay, Dennis responded to her flirtatious behavior the same way he responded to just about everything else she did—with stoic reserve.

During one session, he mentioned that he was even trying to adjust to the fact that Harriet might one day have an affair. His quiet heroics exasperated his wife, who was trying everything within her power to penetrate his defenses and get him to be more interested in her. Those rare times when she managed to get him riled up, he would behave in a reactive response and flee the house. Most of their fights ended with Dennis's zooming off to safety in his Audi sedan.

To lay the groundwork for the exercise, we asked Dennis and Harriet to describe how they had treated each other when they were first in love. As we listened to them, we had the strange feeling that they were talking about two different people. We couldn't imagine Dennis and Harriet going on long Sunday bike rides together, leaving work to meet each other at the movies, and calling each other on the phone two or three times a day.

We asked, "What would happen if you were to go home today and start doing all those things again? What if you were to treat each other the same way you did when you were courting?" They looked at us with puzzled expressions.

"I think I would feel very uncomfortable," Dennis said after a moment's reflection. "I don't like the idea of acting differently from the way I feel. I would feel...dishonest. I don't have the same feelings toward Harriet that I used to, so why should I treat her as if I did?"

Harriet agreed. "It would feel like we were playacting," she said. "We may not be happy, but at least we try to be honest with each other."

When we explained that taking part in the experiment might help them over their impasse, they agreed to give it a try, despite their initial objections. We carefully explained the exercise to them. They were to go home, make their lists, and volunteer to give each other three to five of those behaviors a day. The behaviors were to be gifts. They were to view them as an opportunity to pleasure each other, not as a bartering tool. And, most important of all, they weren't to keep score. They were to focus only on the giving end of the equation. They left the office promising to give the exercise an honest effort.

At the beginning of their next appointment, Dennis reported on the results of the experiment. "I think you're really on to something," he said. "We did what you asked us to do, and today I feel a lot more hopeful about our relationship." We asked him for more details.

"Well, the day after our appointment, I found myself driving around town in a black mood," Dennis volunteered. "I can't even remember what made me feel so down. Anyway, I decided that it was as good a time as any to do what you asked, so I stopped off at a variety store and bought Harriet some flowers. That was one of the requests on her list. So, I gritted my teeth and picked out some daisies, because I remembered she always liked daisies. The clerk asked me if I wanted a note card and I said, 'Why not?' I remember saying to myself, 'We're paying a lot of money for counseling to make things better, so I'd better do

this all the way.' When I came home, I signed the card 'I love you.'" He paused for a moment. "The thing that surprised me, Harville, was that, as I handed Harriet the flowers, I really did care for her."

"And when I read the card," Harriet added, "tears came to my eyes. It's been so long since he's told me he loved me." They went on to describe all the other things that they had done to please each other. She had cooked him pot roast and potato pancakes, his favorite dinner. He had agreed to curl up together in bed as they fell asleep instead of turning his back to her.

As they were recounting these events, there seemed to be remarkably little tension between them. When they left the office, we noticed that as Dennis helped Harriet on with her coat she smiled and said, "Thank you, honey." It was a little thing, but it was the kind of pleasurable give-and-take that had been so absent in their relationship.

We asked Dennis and Harriet to continue to give each other caring behaviors, and at each session they reported a gradual improvement in their relationship. They not only were treating each other more kindly, but were also more willing to explore the issues that underlay their discontent. They spent less of their time in my office complaining about each other and more time exploring the childhood issues that were the reasons for their unhappiness in the first place.

Because Stuart's exercise proved so helpful for Dennis and Harriet, we used it as a model for an expanded exercise that we labeled "Caring Behaviors," because it effectively restored the conflict-free interactions of romantic love. We introduced the Caring Behaviors exercise to other clients and had them share behaviors they currently receive from their partner (current behaviors), behaviors they received in their earlier romantic days together (past behaviors), and behaviors that their partner does not do but if they did, would make them feel loved or cared about (future behaviors). Almost without exception, when couples began artificially to increase the number of times a day that they acted lovingly toward each other, they began to feel safer and more loving. This intensified the emotional bond between them, and as a result they made more rapid progress in their therapy. This exercise is not designed to resolve your deep-seated conflicts, but it will re-establish feelings of safety and pleasure and set the stage for increased intimacy.

Why Does Caring Behaviors Work?

Why is this simple exercise of Caring Behaviors so effective? The obvious reason is that, through daily repetitions of positive behaviors, your old brain begins to perceive your partner as "someone who nurtures me." Painful memories are overlaid with positive transactions, and your partner is no longer categorized as a bringer of death but as a wellspring of life. This opens the way for intimacy, which is only possible in a context of pleasure and safety.

But, there are other, subtler reasons the exercise works so well. One is that it helps people erode the infantile belief that their partners can read their minds. During romantic love,

people operate out of the erroneous belief that their partners know exactly what it is that they want. When their partners fail to satisfy their secret desires, they assume that they are deliberately depriving them of pleasure. This makes them want to deprive their partners of pleasure. The Caring Behaviors exercise prevents this downward spiral by requiring couples to tell each other exactly what pleases them, decreasing their reliance on mental telepathy.

Another consequence of the exercise is that it defeats the tit-for-tat mentality of the power struggle. When couples take part in giving Caring Behaviors, they are instructed to pleasure each other on an independent schedule; they mete out a prescribed number of loving behaviors a day, regardless of the behavior of their partners. This replaces the natural tendency to hand out favors on a quid pro quo basis: "You do this nice thing for me, and I'll do that nice thing for you."

Most relationships are run like a commodities market, with loving behaviors the coin in trade. But this kind of "love" does not sit well with the old brain. If John rubs Martha's shoulders in the hope that she will let him spend the day going fishing, a built-in sensor in Martha's head goes: "Look out! Price tag attached. There is no reason to feel good about this gift, because I'll have to pay for it later." Unconsciously she rejects John's attentions, because she knows that they were designed for his benefit, not hers. The only kind of love that her old brain will accept is the kind with no strings attached: "I will rub your shoulders because I know that you would like it." The back rub has to come as a "gift."

This need to be "gifted" comes straight out of our childhood. When we were infants, love came without price tags. At least for the first few months of our lives, we didn't have to reciprocate when we were patted or rocked or held or fed. And now, in adulthood, a time-locked part of us still craves this form of love. We want to be loved and cared for without having to do anything in return. When our partners grant us caring behaviors independent of our actions, our need for unconditional love appears to be satisfied.

A third benefit of the exercise is that it helps people see that what pleases them is the product of their unique makeup and life experience and can be very different from what pleases their partners. This reinforces the fact that they are separate people. Often, partners in a relationship cater to their own needs and preferences, not to each other's.

For example, a woman we once worked with went to a great deal of trouble to give her husband a surprise fortieth-birthday party. She invited all his friends, cooked his favorite foods, borrowed a stack of his favorite 1960s rock-and-roll records, and organized lively party games.

During the party, her husband acted as if he were enjoying himself, but a few weeks later, in the middle of a counseling session, he got up the courage to tell his wife that he had been secretly miserable. "I've never liked having a fuss made about my birthday," he told her. "You know that. And especially not my fortieth birthday. What I really wanted to do was spend a quiet evening at home with you and the kids. Maybe have a homemade cake and a few presents. You're the one who likes big noisy parties!"

His wife had taken the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," a little too literally. She had unwittingly given her husband a party that suited her

tastes, not his. The Caring Behaviors exercise circumvents this problem by training couples to “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.” This turns their random caring behaviors into “target” behaviors, behaviors that are designed to satisfy their partners’ unique desires.

When couples regularly give each other these target behaviors, they not only improve the superficial climate of their relationship, they also begin to heal old wounds. We have an example from my personal history. We faithfully perform the same exercises that we assign our clients, and the Re-romanticizing exercise is one that we have done so many times it has become integrated into our relationship: it’s something we do without thinking.

For example, one of the things that I (Harville) asked Helen to do for me is to turn down the covers before we go to bed. This request comes from an experience I had over forty years ago. After my mother died, I was taken in by my sister, Maize Lee. She was only eighteen at the time and recently married, but she did a wonderful job of caring for me. One of the things that touched me most was that she would always find time to go into my room before bedtime, turn down my covers, and put out a glass of orange juice or milk for me to drink.

Today, when Helen turns down the covers for me before I climb into bed, I remember Maize Lee and all that she did for me, and I feel very loved indeed. On a deep level, this simple action is re-creating the vital parent-child bond. I feel secure again, and the injury of my childhood is repaired in an adult relationship that has become a zone of love and safety.

The Surprise List

After introducing the Caring Behaviors exercise to scores of couples, we began to notice a curious phenomenon: the positive value of doing this exercise seemed to flatten out after a few months. The couples were faithfully following the instructions, but they were no longer experiencing the deep pleasure they had when they began doing the exercise. It occurred that we needed to build the concept of “random reinforcement” into the exercise. Random reinforcement, one of the principles of behavioral science, is the idea that a pleasurable action loses its effectiveness if it’s repeated with predictable regularity. For example, if your partner brings you coffee in bed every morning, it no longer feels as special as it did when it was an occasional act or “treat.” Random rewards, on the other hand, create an air of uncertainty and expectancy that increases their impact on the receiver.

This concept was discovered accidentally by a group of scientists who were training laboratory animals by rewarding them with treats. One day the apparatus that dispensed the treats malfunctioned, and the animals were not rewarded for their efforts. The next day the machine was repaired and the regular reward schedule was resumed. To the trainers’ surprise, the animals were even more highly motivated to perform than before. The fact that the reward had become unpredictable improved their performance.

The phenomenon of random reinforcement can easily be observed in daily life. Most husbands and wives give each other presents on special occasions like birthdays and

Christmas and anniversaries. These gifts are so customary that they are almost taken for granted. Although the presents may be enjoyed, they don't carry the same emotional impact as a present that is given as a total surprise. A behaviorist would say that the reason routine gifts aren't as exciting is that the "psychoneurological system has become desensitized to predictable, repetitive pleasure." The same principle applies to the Re-romanticizing exercise. When couples become locked into a particular kind of caring behavior—for example, when they give each other back rubs every night before bed or a bouquet of flowers every Saturday—they begin to derive less pleasure from them. A curve ball needs to be thrown in now and then to pique their interest.

To add this element of suspense, we created the idea of the Surprise List exercise. These were caring behaviors above and beyond those requested by either partner. Each would generate a list by paying close attention to their partner's wishes and dreams.

For instance, a woman who casually mentioned to her husband that she liked a dress she saw in a store window might be delighted to find that very dress—in the correct size—hanging in her closet. Likewise, a man who expressed interest in the opera might open the mail and find a love note from his partner and two tickets to a performance.

When couples added unanticipated pleasures like these to their regular caring behaviors, the beneficial effect of the exercise continued on a gentle rise.

The Fun List

As time went on, we made another addition to the Re-romanticizing process. We asked couples to engage in several high-energy, fun activities a week. These were to be spontaneous, one-on-one activities like wrestling, tickling, massaging, showering together, jumping up and down, or dancing.

The reason we added more exuberant activities to the list was that most people tend to choose fairly passive activities as their caring behaviors; they have forgotten how to have fun together. As soon as we noted this trend, we surveyed our clients and found that they spent, on average, about ten minutes a week playing and laughing together.

Improving this bleak statistic became a priority for us. We knew that when couples have fun together they identify each other as a source of pleasure and safety, which intensifies their emotional bond. When the old brain registers a positive flow of energy, it knows that the person associated with the energy is connected to life and safety, and the two people begin to connect with each other on a deeper unconscious level.

The Fear of Pleasure

With the addition of the Surprise List and the Fun List, we now had useful tools to help couples engage on a positive note – all of which together we call Re-romanticizing. But, like

any exercise that leads to personal growth, this simple exercise was often met with resistance. A certain degree of resistance is to be expected. When a couple has been treating each other like enemies for five years, it's going to feel strange to start writing love notes again. The exercise is going to feel artificial and contrived (which, of course, it is), and to the old brain anything that is not routine and habituated feels unnatural. The only way to lessen this automatic resistance is to repeat a new behavior often enough so that it begins to feel familiar and therefore safe.

A deeper source of resistance to the exercise, however, is a paradoxical one—the fear of pleasure. On a conscious level, we go to great lengths to seek happiness. Why, then, should we be afraid of it? To make sense of this reaction, we need to remember that the sensation of being fully alive is deeply pleasurable.

When we were young children, our life energy was boundless and we experienced intense joy. But some of our pleasure was curtailed by our caregivers so that we could be safe and conform to social norms: “Girls don't yell and run.” “Don't jump on the couch.” “Be careful! Come down from that tree.” “You're making too much noise.” But our fun was also cut short because it threatened the repressed state of our caregivers. They had long given up diving into the lake, rolling down the hill, skipping down the sidewalk, and jumping up and down for joy.

As these limits were imposed on us, sometimes in punitive ways, we began to make an unlikely association between pleasure and pain. If we experienced certain kinds of pleasure or perhaps a high degree of pleasure, we were ignored, reprimanded, or punished. On an unconscious level, this negative stimulus triggered the fear of death. Eventually we limited our own pleasure so that we could reduce our anxiety. We learned that to be fully alive was dangerous.

However, applying the strange logic of children, we didn't blame our parents or society for equating pleasure with pain; it simply appeared to be our lot in life. We told ourselves, “My parents limited my pleasure, so I must not have been worthy of it.” It was somehow safer to believe that we were intrinsically undeserving than to believe that our parents were incapable of meeting our needs or had deliberately diminished our happiness. Gradually we developed a built-in prohibition against pleasure.

People who grew up experiencing a great deal of repression tend to have a particularly hard time with the Caring Behaviors exercise. They have difficulty coming up with any requests for caring behaviors, or they sabotage their partners' efforts to carry them out.

For example, one of our clients, a man with low self-esteem, wrote down on his list that he would like his partner to give him one compliment a day. This was easy for his partner to do because she thought he had a lot of admirable qualities. But when she tried to give him a daily compliment, he would immediately contradict her statement or qualify it to the point that it became meaningless. If she were to say something like “I liked the way you were talking to our son, Robbie, last night,” he would nullify it with a self-criticism: “Yeah. Well, I should do that more often. I never spend enough time with him.” Hearing anything good about himself was ego-dystonic, incompatible with his self-image. His determination to maintain this negative opinion was so strong that we had to train him to respond mechanically to his partner's kind remarks with a “thank you” and leave it at that.

There was one man in our practice whose resistance to the Caring Behaviors exercise took a different form: he just couldn't seem to understand the instructions. "I just don't get the hang of this," he said after the second session devoted to an explanation of the exercise, ". Now, what is it that I'm supposed to do?" We went over the instructions once again, making sure they were clearly understood. We knew, however, that his lack of comprehension was a cover-up for his inability to ask for something pleasurable.

To help him over his emotional roadblock, we told him that, even though it appeared that asking his wife to do nice things for him was solely for his benefit, it was also a way for his wife to learn how to become a more loving person—which happened to be true. When it was put in this less self-serving context, he quickly understood the exercise. He was able to call a truce with the demon inside of him that told him he was not worthy of love. He took out a pencil and in a matter of minutes came up with a list of twenty-six things he would like her to do for him.

Some partners have a difficult time with this exercise. They want to cooperate, but they just can't think of anything their partners can do for them; they don't seem to have any needs or desires. What they are really doing is hiding behind the psychic shield they erected as children to protect themselves from over-bearing parents. They discovered early in life that one way to maintain a feeling of autonomy around their intrusive parents was to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves. When they deprived their parents of this valuable information, their parents were less able to invade their space. After a while, many respond by doing the ultimate disappearing act and hide their feelings from themselves. In the end, it is safest not to know.

It is often the case that these people unwittingly re-create the struggle of their childhood by marrying people who have an unsatisfied need for intimacy. This way they perpetuate the conflict that consumed them as children—not as an idle replay of the past, or a neurotic addiction to pain, but as an unconscious act aimed at the resolution of fundamental human needs. When a fuser-isolater couple does this exercise, it results in a predictable dichotomy. One partner painfully ekes out one or two requests, while the other furiously scribbles a long list of "I wants." To the casual observer it appears that one is a self-sufficient individual with few needs and the other has limitless desires. The fact of the matter is that both individuals have the identical need to be loved and cared for. It's just that one of them happens to be more in touch with those feelings than the other.

Whatever a person's reason for resisting this exercise, our prescription is the same: "Keep doing the exercise exactly as described. Even if it causes you anxiety, keep it up. Do it harder and more aggressively than before. Eventually your anxiety will go away."

Given enough time and enough repetition, your brain can adjust to a different reality. The person with low self-esteem can gradually carve out a more positive identity. The person who thrives on having "low needs" has a chance to discover that sharing secret desires does not compromise his or her independence. The fear of new behaviors gives way to the pleasure they stimulate, and they begin to be associated with safety and life. The caring-behavior exercise becomes a comfortable, reliable tool for personal growth.

You Can Make Love All the Time

The power of the Re-romanticizing exercises with your partner has convinced us that insight and behavioral change make powerful allies. It is not enough for a couple to understand the sexual complaints and unconscious motivations that they bring to their relationship. Insight alone does not heal childhood wounds. Nor is it sufficient to introduce behavioral changes into a relationship without the couples understanding the reasons behind them.

Experience has taught us that the most effective form of change is one that combines both schools of thought. We trust that this resource has shown you that it's possible to make love all the time and enjoy sex too – when you acknowledge sexual complaints and create a zone of safety in your relationship. As you apply this new perspective, we hope your relationship experiences a level of intimacy and excitement like never before!

- Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt

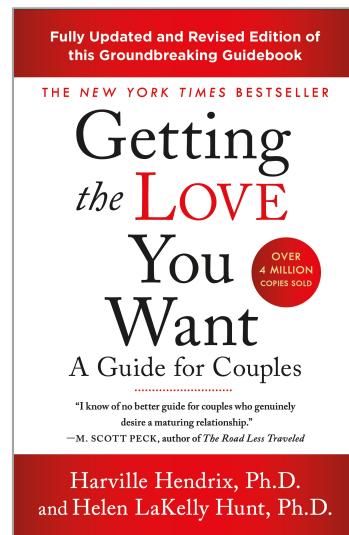
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About the Authors

Harville Hendrix Ph.D. is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, *Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide*, and with his wife, **Helen LaKelly Hunt Ph.D.**, *Giving the Love that Heals: A Guide for Parents*. Harville and Helen have written over 10 books with more than 3 million copies sold. In addition, Harville has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey television program 17 times.



Harville and Helen co-created Imago Relationship Therapy to promote the transformation of couples and families and create relational cultures that support universal equality. Together, they have developed a variety of resources to help couples, families, and educators strengthen their relationship knowledge and skills. In addition, they co-founded Imago Relationships International, a non-profit organization that has trained thousands of therapists in educators in 51 countries around the world.

Harville has over 40 years experience working as a couple's therapist, educator, clinical trainer, and lecturer. His educational background includes graduate degrees from Union Theological Seminary (NY), the University of Chicago, and a former professor at Southern Methodist University. In addition to being co-creator of Imago, Helen has been inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame for her support of the women's movement.

Harville and Helen have been married for 36 years and have six children and six grandchildren. They live in New York City and Dallas. For more information, visit:

<http://www.HarvilleandHelen.com>

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Material in this resource is excerpted from:

Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples (pp. 116 - 130)
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175 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010
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