

AVALON

# MAKING IT WORK



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO MARRIAGE



# MAKING IT WORK, THE SIMPLE GUIDE TO MARRIAGE, with David Kavanagh

## INTRODUCTION

THERE are hundreds of thousands of relationship guides out there, all crammed full of statistics, scientific reasonings and snappy facts.

And while reading each and every one of them might work for some, the majority of us simply don't have the time or energy to wade through 'miracle quick fix' guides in order to find some helpful, solid advice.

The truth is, there is no quick fix when problems arise, but there is a method and formula which will help you make your marriage a success.

In this no-nonsense guide, David Kavanagh will present to you some eye-opening facts about marriage, and about how you can make it work long term.

He has taken out all of the slog associated with trekking through tons of relationship manuals to bring you an easy to understand, no frills guide which will take you from the very foundation of great marriage to the tricks that keep the magic alive.



# THE SEVEN STEPS

In the heady first few months of a new relationship, neither of you can do any wrong. The hormones have taken over and the rose tinted glasses are on. Your sexual appetite is working perfectly in harmony, the future is bright and sunny, and you promise your significant other: I'll always feel this way.

What could go wrong? Well, lots, actually.

The top issues which married couples go head to head about relate to financial affairs, sexual affairs, extramarital affairs and then the fallout from the more mundane domestic affairs. First, we will list seven simple steps to make sure the occasional argument doesn't descend into divorce. They may surprise you.

**1.** When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Except in marriage, that is. Trust and dependability are two rudimentary elements needed to make sure your marriage will stay on track. If you know you can depend on each other when the road gets rocky, confide, and be confided in, that's a good start.

It's inevitable that every marriage will eventually come up against a crisis. There are marriages that can withstand the greatest challenges such as the death of a child, and then there are some that fall to pieces when faced with much, much less. The way to determine how strong your marriage will be is by learning how you should cope with the crises of life.

You know the drill, in sickness and in health – you stick with your partner not only for the good times, but the bad times too. Those challenging times will shape your marriage just as much as the carefree days, and they will make you much stronger if you can weather the storm to the other side. As Dolly Parton once said, 'the way I see it is, if you want the rainbow, you'll just have to put up with the rain.'

According to David Kavanagh, relationship expert, trust is the very foundation of a good marriage.

'In my experience of healthy relationships, trust is absolutely paramount in order for it to work. I was recently interviewed by RTE's John Murray who asked me if I thought, for example, that it was OK to spy on a partner's text messages or emails.

'I say, absolutely not, under no circumstances. This would be a fundamental mainstay of a successful relationship in that you trust your partner enough not to have to do this. If you have worries that are making you want to do this, ask your partner what is going on. Don't accuse them. Because once you accuse them, they automatically defend themselves and it is as if you have presumed their guilt and that is unfair.'

A few ways to ensure that you have that trust and strength in your relationship are as follows:

Give each other time. Not only time to talk, time to laugh, but also time alone.

Get to know yourself fully. Make a date with yourself to watch the movie you like, go to the restaurant you love. Because once you are happy within yourself, and you know yourself, you give yourself the chance to really be happy with someone else.

Also, it is worth bearing in mind that your partner needs space ,too.

Absence really does make the heart grow fonder, and by spending some time apart you learn to recognise all those reasons why you adore your partner so much.

Knowing yourself will give you the personal strength and in turn, give your relationship strength.

Another obvious tip is to keep the intimacy, whether you do this through, hugging, kissing, or sex. Relate counsellor Elizabeth Martyn says in her book 'Before You Say I Do': 'A good sex life creates a basis of intimacy and trust in the relationship, which can give a terrific boost in helping you through hard times.'

She also points out that if you really want that sense of dependability, you have to be there for him or her, as much as they are there for you. Trust is a two-way road. Examine how well you work together in a crisis.

Do you go into yourself, sulk, or bemoan the cross you have to carry?

If so, stop. It won't achieve anything and it will drive your partner up the walls and out of the house. There are few things more attractive than a man or woman who takes on life's burdens with gusto and keeps their chin up. Try it, it works.

And when you're doing that, be mindful not to take it on all by yourself. A problem shared is a problem halved.

Kavanagh says that all trust is based on honesty – no matter what the circumstances.

'If you find yourself developing a close relationship with a colleague for example, and you have a feeling you may be falling in love, then you need to be honest about this from the very beginning.

It's a challenging thing to do, but it is actually what needs to happen. Now the couple has an opportunity to process what's happening.

You can now try to see why this is happening, and where the root cause of the problem may be. That is honesty, and that's what makes trust.'

**2.** There is another basic foundation which every successful relationship should be built upon and that is the simple concept of communication. As we discussed, your partner is someone you can turn to when life throws a bucket of icy water in your face.

But communication is so much more than talking a problem through, it is all in your body language too.

A smile, a touch, or the expression on his or her face when your partner walks in the door: this all goes towards showing you what kind of mood your partner is in, and how you should communicate with them.

When it comes to communicating, affection is your friend.

Different couples have different versions of affection. It could be poking his belly, or kissing her on the nose, but it all goes towards communicating the greater message that you are there for that person.

Communicating is also about listening.

We like people who make us feel that they are interested in us, and what we are saying.

Pay attention when your partner speaks to you, particularly if what she or he is saying is important to them. Validation of each other's experiences is crucial to long-term relationships; and you cannot validate if you have not even heard what he or she has said – so listen!

According to Kavanagh, it is important to establish a 'set of rituals' which can help a couple connect with each other from early on.



‘This could be something like, not going straight to the TV when you get in from work and instead speaking to your partner beforehand. Then you’ll be in tune with your partner. Which is more important, your favourite soap opera, or how your partner is feeling.

Another idea is to make a weekly space for the couple to engage for example a date night that doesn’t just involve a couple going to the cinema.

Talking over dinner, face to face, and making it regular, these are the kind of things you can do to make sure the lines of communication are open.’

In their book, *Why Men Don’t Have A Clue and Women Always Need More Shoes*, the authors Allan and Barbara Pease single out nagging as one of the most destructive forms of communication.

Nagging is when someone just won’t let up. It’s like a dripping tap, or Chinese torture to men. Women think that nagging shows they care, but men don’t see it that way, say the authors.

The verb ‘to nag’ comes from the Scandinavian word to gnaw or nibble. So it might be best if you stopped gnawing, literally, at your partner.

The authors of that book say that one of the big problems for men is when multi-tasking happens during the nagging process. It’s all too much, and he will simply shut off.

Nagging never works. It is self-defeating and destructive. So that’s one form of communication that you can scratch.

There is a myth out there that all you have to do to save a marriage is to learn to communicate better. It is of vital importance, but it’s about so much more than that also.

**3.** The two of you can do all the talking in the world, but none of it will work if there is no sense of mutual respect, fondness, and admiration.

The three go hand in hand. It is important, very important in fact, to let your other half know that they are always worthy of being respected, liked, looked up to and admired. John Gottman, a world renowned couples’ therapist, says in his book *The Seven Principles Of Making Marriage Work*, ‘If a couple still has a functioning fondness and admiration system, their marriage is salvageable.’

These are wise words. If, through all the heartache and problems that will surely come, you can look upon the other still with the admiration you had when you first met, and respect them as much as the day you said I Do, there is little that can get in your way.

He may leave newspapers all over the bathroom floor, and she may leave high heels in doorways waiting for you to fall over them, but beyond someone’s foibles you can see their worth.

You respect them. You admire who they are and what has shaped them, before you two even met. You might even call him or her your better half.

If the issues you are having in your marriage mean that you no longer know if you like, respect and admire your partner, try this. Stop focussing on what is wrong now, how hurt or angry you may feel, and think about the past. If you can’t remember what it was that made you like him or her in the beginning, you have a serious problem.

But this is rare, and the chances are you will smile while remembering the first dates. Seize on this and realise that this person you fell in love with is the person you are still with. All of it, it’s still there, you just have to look for it.

In order to nurture this aspect of your relationship, emphasise the positive aspects of your relationship. Remind him or her what you admire so much about them. This will stop you ever falling into the trap of being contemptuous when arguments come about.

**4.** You have all the boxes ticked so far. You might be wondering why you even sought the advice of a relationship guide. But there is not one couple in the world that doesn't have an issue with their other half when it comes to the horizontal tango. Yes, we are talking about midnight Olympics here, and as Barbara and Allan Pease put it: 'Sex is like air, it's not important unless you are not getting any.'

'Couples need to work hard at trying new things in order to make keep their sex live alive', says David Kavanagh.

'Sometimes couples tend to take on board ideas or norms that have come from the outside world. She may think if she goes to the local lingerie shop and wears the sexiest outfit, that will help their sex life. But he might just find her sexy in her tracksuits, and this is true.

'Couples need to work hard, so, to try new things that turn them both on. They need to be honest with their fantasies. Most fantasies are harmless, they are fun, they are enjoyable. When it gets boring and you just do the monotonous routine, that's when you need to have a talk about what turns your partner on, and get started.'

According to Andrew G Marshall in his book, *Make Love Like a Prairie Vole*, there are two levels of fantasy.

He says: 'The first, we are happy to reveal to our friends and our partners.

These will often feature famous faces and 'respectable' people who will more than likely know very little about us.

'The second level we will only share with great reluctance (possibly only to a researcher or anonymously in an internet chat room) In sharp contrast to our public fantasies, these are detailed, dirty, and sometimes disturbing.'

He points out that in the end, fantasies can improve your relationship – after all your imagination is your most powerful sexual organ.

Couples who manage to keep their sex lives simmering are generally couples who have the same ideas and expectations about sex. Any stressful event such as having a baby, dealing with bereavement or taking on a stressful job can affect your libido. Learning to go with the ebb and flow of two sex drives is something which will take time, but it's doable.

If the two of you are having sex often enough to satisfy both of you, you will have a happier marriage all round. If you can be happy in the bed, you will have a stronger chance of being happy outside of it too. It is about more than the act itself. Being able to give pleasure and receive pleasure in this way is the most intimate thing you can do, and that's why it's important: for the bond it creates. Some tips for ensuring your sex life stays sizzling hot:

Keep fit and look after your body. The more exercise you do, the better you will feel about your body, and in tandem, the better you will feel about sex. It goes without saying that keeping good personal hygiene is a must. You want to turn your other half on – not turn them off with BO. Vary the times in which you have sex, any kind of routine will become dull.

Sex after 11pm every few nights may start to feel like a daily chore to the point. It's a bedroom, not a garage where vehicles get serviced. Which leads us to varying the place and position you get down and dirty in: be willing to try new things and let your inhibitions go, after all, you can trust each other completely.

As a final note, studies have verified the following point. Men who clean toilets get more sex. Women who always make sure their legs and underarms are shaved get more sex. Consider yourselves warned.



**5.** Next up at number five, it's the old chestnut. Money's too tight to mention – but never mind Mick Hucknall, you had better start mentioning how your financial affairs will work out. The common conception is that extramarital affairs are the top reason for discord in any marriage, but nothing blows a fuse quite like rows about financial affairs. When you marry, your concept of finance changes dramatically. Gone are the days when you skipped along just fine with separate bank accounts and separate finances. The likelihood is that you are living together, and if you are living together, you are sharing the costs.

You may have bought a house together, had a baby, or still be paying off the loan you took out for that stunning wedding. Either ways, staying on top of your monetary affairs will keep more than just the taxman happy – it will guide you in the right direction on that rocky road towards a healthy, happy marriage.

In his book, *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*, John Gottman outlines a number of steps a couple can take in order to resolve money issues.

He points out that 'clear-headed budgeting' will take you far, as long as it is not too stringent as one or the other may end up feeling resentful. Ultimately, he says, it's about 'being a team'.

Key ways to ensure that there won't be any blown fuses include: Getting your priorities right. What he wants and what she wants are two very different things, something we will deal with later in greater detail. But when this crosses over into bank accounts, it becomes one of the most common financial wrangles between twosomes.

So compromise is your ally here. He may want a new motorbike, she may want a sun holiday. Put some money aside separately for both at the same time, and who knows you might just be able to combine the two. Now there's a thought.

Another tip would be to ensure there is no element of secrecy. Not telling your partner that you have fallen into debt is pointless, because it's only going to get worse. The earlier you seek to repay a debt, the better, and you don't have to be Einstein to know that. Be upfront, no matter how unpalatable the truth is.

**6.** We're best friends, right? For 90 per cent of people, factors other than early hormone rushes are needed to sustain a relationship in the long term, argue the Pease's in *Why Men Want Sex and Women Need Love*.

There is an old adage that says that if you do not lust after your husband, he is nothing but a friend. But the same is true in reverse, if he is not your friend, the lust will die off and there will be little to show for the relationship.

All the common courtesies of having a 'normal' friend apply here. This involves having patience and listening to the ins and outs of their daily lives, being there for them when they need you, making that time to see them, planning days together, calling each other up randomly to say hello. Once married, it is a natural progression that your husband or wife should become your best friend and closest relative, but as with all other friends, this requires hard work.

**7.** Finally, and it may seem simple but full acceptance of your partner will complete what is already an extremely solid foundation. He may not be Zac Efron, and she may not be Heidi Klum, but having any mentality that even veers towards 'if they were taller/richer/skinnier/sexier I'd be much more happy' is perilous.

You need to accept your husband or wife, foibles and flaws, warts and all. If you don't accept them for who they are, then you are on a relentless campaign to try and change your partner. There is no point in trying to change someone so much that they are unrecognisable by the time your mind has completed the transformation it would like to see. And yes, Zac Efron looks great, but he could be dull as dishwater for all you know.

The grass really is greener on the other side.

# DON'T DO IT! THE PITFALLS

John Gottman is one of the world's leading researchers on why marriages survive or fail. With a team of researchers at his University of Washington laboratory, known as the "Love Lab", Gottman has studied hundreds of couples having arguments.

After years of research, he is able to predict with 88 to 94 per cent accuracy if a marriage will fail. His research shows that there are a number of pitfalls that a couple can fall into. These must be avoided like the bubonic plague. There are four pitfalls, and these are:

## 1. Criticism:

Criticism is the act of attacking or being negative about your partner. Most couples argue and have complaints from time to time but direct, consistent criticism is one of the most damaging things you can do.

An example of this: John comes home from a long day at work, and says he believes his boss has it in for him. His wife Jane says: 'You sound paranoid to me, you always think people are out to get you. I have noticed that you always seem to complain about this.' By shrugging off her husband's complaint and then telling him he is paranoid, Jane is both ignoring her husband's feelings and criticising his attitude.

Would it not have been more supportive to ask him what had happened, and reassure him that he's perfectly good at whatever job he sets his mind to? We didn't just single out an example of female criticism here for no reason: research has shown that women are much more critical than men so this may be one for the ladies.

## 2. Defensiveness:

Defensiveness is a refusal to accept that any of your partner's complaints may be valid. Defensive people are unable to admit that they have flaws or that they may be wrong. The antidote to this is so simple it's laughable: accept responsibility for at least a small part of the issue which has led to the confrontation.

Admit it, you aren't always right. Many people are only defensive as a way of protecting themselves against a perceived attack, but the odds are you have a hand to play it in.

## 3. Contempt:

Contempt tells your partner that you have no respect for him or her. Sarcasm, disrespect and extreme criticism are all forms of contempt. People who use contempt are unable to argue without belittling their partners.

Simply put, if you're being contemptuous you are putting your other half down so that you can take the higher ground. It's when you think, I'm better than you are, or smarter than you are, and it's one of the most negative pitfalls or habits anyone can fall in to.

What happened to respect and admiration?



# DON'T DO IT! THE PITFALLS

## 4. Stonewalling:

Stonewalling, or “giving the silent treatment”, is a refusal to talk to your partner, negotiate the conflict or look for a resolution. You are taking yourself out of the conversation, but staying in the same room.

It's a selfish act and really, stonewalling is silent contempt – the message is that you cannot be bothered to resolve the argument. If an argument is getting heated, you may feel that a break is necessary. This is fine, but you should let your partner know.

If your lips are pursed and your arms are folded, you are saying that you don't care when you really, really do, you are stonewalling. The solution is to calm yourself, open your mouth, and talk it out.

These four ‘horsemen’, as they are sometimes known, are easily avoided.

But as pitfalls go, they are nothing compared to the difficulties some couples find themselves facing. These can include the discovery of infertility, infidelity or issues about how children should be raised.

Let's deal with these three now, as they represent the more serious side of the spectrum.

# INFERTILITY

Unless a couple is aware that they may have trouble conceiving, infertility is not a problem for which most of us plan.

It's not something we think of in those passionate first years of romance when such issues seem like they belong in some one else's life.

Most couples presume that marriage will give them the right and ability to have babies. If a couple has not discussed how they will proceed if their hoped for children do not arrive, the discovery that one partner may not be able to have children can cause great strain.

Fertility treatments may not be possible or too expensive, nor do they always work, but this is one option open to a couple.

Adoption is not an option for some people, and disappointment may lead to blame or guilt. This can cause irreparable damage. A husband or wife who blames their partner for not giving them a child may decide to end the relationship and look for someone else.

However if this is something which both parties can agree to, and would like to go ahead with, it is a promising and often fulfilling choice.

Either ways, the key to making sure this is not the final curtain for the two of you is to realistically talk about your expectations. Once you both know what you want, and agree, you can set about moving over this stumbling block, and in the process build a deeper trust and love.

## INFIDELITY:

Many people believe that infidelity is an unforgivable act of disloyalty. For the injured party, it's devastating. And when it comes to the most cited reason for divorce, it's playing away.

The discovery of an extramarital sexual liaison can put a marriage in serious jeopardy. The straying partner may decide that being caught gives him or her an opportunity to call time on the relationship; or the betrayed partner may feel that trust can never be re-established. David Kavanagh says there is a multitude of reasons why a man or woman may cheat on their partner.

'Cheating can happen for a variety of reasons. The person may feel unloved, stressed, bored, unattractive or unappreciated. These are the common causes. There are things you can do to prevent cheating. That element we discussed of staying in touch, of keeping the sexual bond, that will help. You also need to understand what your partner is going through on a day to day basis, don't just presume you know them, make sure you know them.

If your husband says he's having a tough time at work, what does that actually mean?

Do you know what he's talking about? Is she looking after the baby full-time, and are you listening to her, as well? Remember to always treat your partner with love and affection.'

As David has outlined, the act of cheating is often a symptom of more serious relationships problems.

A couple that are unwilling to deal with these problems may use infidelity as a reason to separate. It can be a smoke-screen for something else, and if it is, the guilty party must be honest about this.



# INFERTILITY

Because it is very true that infidelity is not always about the sex, or the thrill of the forbidden fruit. It can rear its ugly head when there are other problems in the relationship which gives us a clear message: Look after your relationship, do not neglect it.

In her book, *After the Affair*, Counsellor Julia Cole lists some of the signs that one partner may be susceptible to an affair. Take note of these, they include: repeated arguments that are never resolved, not talking about important areas of your relationship, struggling with a crisis such as illness or bereavement, having a dull but busy lifestyle that doesn't give you time for each other or sex problems that you haven't talked about.

Allan and Barbara Pease believe that there are nine types of affair, and they have broken them down as follows: The Do I Still Have Market Value Affair, the Mid Life Crisis Affair, The Comparison Affair, The Time Bomb Affair, The Getting Even Affair, The Shoulder To Cry On Affair, The Upgrade Affair, The I Can't Get My Needs Met Affair and the Unintentional Affair.

The reason for listing these categories out is to show that researchers have proven that many affairs happen for a reason, so much so that it is possible to break them down into their own neat little categories.

The good news is that, with a willingness to confront the reasons why infidelity has happened, genuine remorse and a sincere effort to forgive and forget, infidelity is not necessarily a marriage buster by itself.

No doubt some tips would come in handy here about the steps you can take to affair-proof your marriage. Relate Counsellor Elizabeth Martyn suggests these: being honest and open about your feelings, building on your commitment to each other (we discussed this earlier on), showing them you care for them, and never taking their fidelity for granted.

Another good tip would be to agree on the boundaries you have in place for seeing other people: Is it ok for you to see someone of the opposite sex on your own socially? If not, say it. If so, say it.

One final tip:

Keep the spark alive in the bedroom, keep the sensual side to your relationship and allow yourself to give and receive pleasure.

# LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

Whoever coined the phrase men are from Mars and women are from Venus was completely and totally correct. Let's face the facts here: Men and Women do live worlds apart, and once we understand exactly how far apart we are, we go that extra mile towards understanding our significant other.

There is a wealth of researchers studying the human brain who have discovered a wealth of knowledge which clearly shows that we are born with a circuitry hard wired into the brain that influences how we behave.

Delving into the topic in further depth, it is this circuitry which determines why men and women want such different things from a relationship. To touch on the science of it, men have almost twenty times the amount of testosterone than women, which will come as no surprise to any woman who has been poked awake by an erection first thing in the morning.

And then it may come as no surprise to men that women have significantly more oxytocin also known as the 'cuddle hormone', released in vast quantities after orgasm. This same chemical gives a heightened sense of awareness and sensitivity. Again, no big surprises. It's the little things that help us get to know the other better.

In *Why Men Want Sex and Women Need Love*, Barbara and Allan Pease list 15 mysteries about men that women do not, but should, understand. These range from why men wake up in the morning with an erection, why sex can be just sex for men, what men worry about and why they don't seem to mind wearing speedos.

Then there are the twelve truths about women that men don't know. These include: Why women so rarely initiate sex, why women prefer chocolate to sex and why they fantasise about bad, bad men.

While a lot of that seems like fun, it's nice to address those simple things when trying to understand the other sex. But on a more personal scale, as individuals, you both have your own personalities. When you're together, there is like a third personality, the 'him and her' when the two meet in the middle. So there are three aspects you need to get to know.

Understanding your partner, what makes them tick, why they do the little things they do, right up to their religious or political beliefs is just as important as all the issues we have already highlighted.

According to Kavanagh, 'When your partner is telling you that something is bothering them, don't just give them a pat on the shoulder and ask them if they want a cup of tea.

Take the time to actually understand exactly what the issue is. This starts a process in the brain whereby your partner will, the next time, know that they can talk to you.

It's like forming a good habit, really.'



## HEAL RIFTS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

While we dealt with this a little earlier on in the seven steps, it really merits an entire section as one of the worst things a twosome can do is brush an issue under the carpet. Here are some key methods you can use to bring that mountain back down to the mole hill it really is.

The argument is raging to an abrupt end, and you've no idea how to finish this without the situation worsening. In his A-Z guide of Relationships, David Kavanagh talks about reconciliation gestures and how you can use them to your advantage.

He points out that an argument with your partner is not a political debate – being right or scoring points is less important than finding a resolution. The next time you argue, consider adopting some reconciliation postures. Try using 'open' body language – face your partner, uncross your arms or legs and keep your palms faced upwards. All these suggest that you are receptive to what is being said.

Men should consider sitting down. Height tends to command respect, but in an argument with a partner this can be a disadvantage – a man's greater height can be perceived as threatening (even if you do not mean to be). Sitting, so you are around the same size as your partner, suggests you see eye to-eye, whereas lowering your body so that you are smaller is a submissive gesture – not necessarily a bad thing if you want to end an argument.

In John Gottman's Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work, he says only 40 per cent of divorces arise from having frequent fights. More often marriages end because, to avoid such skirmishes, husband and wife distance themselves so much that their friendship and sense of connection are lost.

He recommends that when you want to say something which might not be what your other half wants to hear, you avoid the 'harsh start up' which basically means start as you mean to go on. If you want the potential argument to end in all-out war, then start with a harsh tone of voice and with cutting words. If you really don't want to fight, don't start the conversation in fight mode. In resolving any conflict, compromise becomes a key issue, but when to compromise is just as pressing.

There are times when you should compromise and then there are times when you should not. It is never a good idea to compromise your values and principles – doing so may lead to far greater problems in the long run. Instead, you should accept that you and your partner are individuals who see the world differently and that neither one of you has all the answers.

Always look at the situation from your partner's perspective before deciding whether or not you need to compromise. For some of the very contentious issues, such as money and sex, you both may have to compromise.

Furthermore, when it comes to resolving a conflict, it is vital to remember that there has to be a solid base on which to fall back on.

If either partner feels judged, misunderstood or taken advantage of, you will find it very difficult to resolve the problems in your marriage.

In the words of John Gottman: 'An important lesson I have learned is that in all arguments, both solvable and perpetual, no one is ever right. There is no absolute reality in marital conflict, only two subjective realities.'

He also notes: 'For a marriage to go forward happily, you need to pardon each other and give up on past resentments. This can be hard to do, but it is well worth it. When you forgive your spouse, you both benefit. Bitterness is a heavy burden.'

## **RECONNECTING: KEEPING IT ALIVE, LONG TERM**

Sometimes, when it comes to reclaiming a relationship's glory days, we have to go back to basics. For men, a quick checklist of what women want may come in handy. Women want to be loved, adored, respected, trusted, needed, thought of and never taken advantage of.

For women, men usually want tickets to the match final. Well, all kidding aside, a man needs the exact same things, plus solitary time uninterrupted, and plenty of sex, of course.

There are little things you can do to rediscover that thrilling, all-consuming spark. In many long-term relationships, people forget to flirt with each other, says relationship expert David Kavanagh. If you have been together for years, you may think this is not necessary.

It is – at least every now and again! Make time for flirting. Arrange regular date nights where you go out and enjoy each other's company.

Dress up, and pledge not to talk about domesticity or children. Flirt with one another the way you would if you were trying to seduce your partner all over again.

It may seem silly at first, especially if you have not done it for a long time, but flirting is a way of expressing your delight and attraction to each other, and that is important.

And don't forget, as relationship expert David Kavanagh pointed out: 'It's so important to always set aside that time together. Like I said earlier, things like a date night, a weekend away.

That connection will help to ensure the relationship is successful.'

## **FROM A – Z, THE END**

Throughout the course of this guide, various authors, researchers and experts have been quoted. Your own author, David Kavanagh, has written a book snappily titled the A-Z of Relationships, and if you want some reading to complement this course we humbly suggest you pick up a copy on our website.

Here is a quick taste of the run down from A-Z, with an exercise at the end which may open your eyes a little bit to all of the issues we have highlighted here.

## **ACCEPTANCE**

Acceptance and accommodation are important. In any relationship you need to accept that you both have personality traits that play a part in how you relate to one another. You need to accept your partner's foibles, but, it is equally important to accept your own.

Acceptance comes from the understanding of the 'I' that we each bring to the 'Us'. However, true acceptance goes further: it is recognising and understanding that you come from different family backgrounds, and that these have helped shape the people you are today.

Accepting your partner includes accepting his or her family. You don't have to love them, or even like them, but you have to accept that they are part and parcel of who your partner is.



## **BEDROOM**

Your bedroom should be a haven away from your children and romantic space for you as a couple. This sounds obvious, but many couples allow children's toys and domestic mess to invade their space.

For most couples, the frequency of sex falls off after a few years of marriage, so it's a good idea to have a sexy space to get you in the mood.

The colour spectrum is divided into warm and cool colours. Yellows, oranges, and orange-based reds are warm colours, whereas blues, greens and blue-based reds are cool.

For bedroom décor, blues and greens are said to be calming, pastels are relaxing, reds are exciting, oranges are happy and neutrals are safe.

Include as many sensory treats as possible in your bedroom.

One last thing – one of you may be more likely to leave clothes strewn around the bedroom (and this is not always the man!).

Try talking to your partner about this, or placing the laundry basket so it is convenient for the offending person. If none of this works, remember that some people are messier than others and this may just be one of the 'for worse' parts you have to learn to accept.

Ask yourself what is more conducive to a happy relationship – picking up his or her laundry or constantly nagging your partner?

## **EYES:**

If you are talking to a friend, you look at them between 30 to 60 per cent of the time. When you first fall in love, this increases to an incredible 75 per cent of the time – you get lost in your partner's eyes.

When people fall in love, phenylethylamine is secreted by the nervous system.

If you want to rekindle some of the initial passion, make this work to your advantage. If you look into your partner's eyes 75 per cent of the time, you trick their brain into believing they are falling in love with you all over again and phenylethylamine starts to pump.

Obviously you need to choose a suitable moment to do this and be careful not to stare at them like a deer caught in headlights – that's more likely to scare them.

## **ROMANCE:**

What exactly is romance?

The dictionary defines romance as a feeling of excitement and mystery associated with love, a love affair and, somewhat unfortunately, as an exaggeration or lie.

Romance and falling in love are part of the universal human experience. People have always fallen in love and studies have shown that the way we experience this romantic high is remarkably similar across cultures. Accountants and artists, Aborigines, New Yorkers and Zulus, Roman centurions and UN peacekeepers, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals all experience love in much the same way.

While the experience of love is universal, some social historians have argued that romance is a product of the modern world. As the West became industrialised from the eighteenth century onwards, the old certainties of family, religion and class slipped away, to be replaced with a greater emphasis on the individual and individual fulfilment.

Romance, say these thinkers, is nothing more than the idealisation of someone we find incredibly sexually attractive, and a part of our modern preoccupation with finding meaning in a life shared with a loved one.

What we see as romantic, at least in books and movies, has remained remarkably consistent for hundreds of years. From the classics to modern comedies, romantic stories follow the same basic plot – meeting, misunderstandings and marriage.

Lovers meet and are separated, complications ensue, and finally the pair are reunited. “The course of true love never did run smooth,” says Lysander in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – but you already know that!

There also seems to be a biological drive for romance.

Using functional magnetic resonance imagers, scientists have found evidence that the parts of the brain at work when we’re in love are different from those that govern sexual attraction.

According to the biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, we have a biological drive to find that special someone. Fisher believes that people have three separate emotion motivation systems: one for mating, a second for reproduction and a third for parenting.

These are lust, attraction and attachment or love respectively. Lust kicks off the whole thing, attraction helps us choose a specific partner, and love is supposed to keep the show on the road, at least until the children are old enough to fend for themselves.

Whether it is biological, social or cultural or some combination of all these forces, for most of us romance is a very important part of our relationships, and that lack of it can lead to great unhappiness, loneliness and feelings of low self-worth.

## **SENSE OF HUMOUR**

Attraction may be partly chemical, partly unconscious and partly still a mystery, but there’s one thing almost all of us agree on – a good sense of humour is an attractive quality.

There’s a catch here – women like a man to be funny, whereas a man prefers a woman who laughs at his jokes. Sharing laughter is important.

If needs be, steal jokes, watch comedies together and don’t be afraid to be silly.

This affects how you relate to each other.

**ENDS**

