



HOW CAN I REKINDLE MY **RELATIONSHIP?**

How can I rekindle my relationship?

Before we get started let's get something straight: you're not alone.

Every relationship needs re-kindling sometimes. At some point everyone rolls over to see their partner in the half-light, with pillow-creases on their cheek and dried dribble on their chin, and thinks, 'Is this it?' And that's okay.

Just because there's no roaring flame it doesn't necessarily mean there's something wrong with the relationship. It just means it is a relationship.

But that also doesn't mean it's not frustrating, and there are certain practical steps you can take to minimise the heartache.

What to do

Look inside

Instead of automatically assuming that just because you're not feeling fireworks your relationship is flawed, ask yourself what role your own insecurities might be playing in the current situation.

Speak the unspeakable

Don't be afraid to talk to your partner about the loss of the spark. It's not a confession of failure.

Re-romanticise

What small, caring gestures did you and your partner used to do for each other that you could reintroduce?

Create space

Try to be there for your partner as a space, not just a loving person.

Be real

Accept that the nature of romantic love means inevitable highs and lows – be receptive, and make space for them.

Look inside

Put the grand gestures on hold for a minute because we're about to get introspective. When addressing a dry patch in your relationship, look deep inside yourself first. Is it possible that the current patch of tumbleweed could have something to do with your attitude and behaviour?

Unresolved personal problems are likely to become problems within your relationship, so it's worthwhile spending some time searching for them.

Who do you want to be? How do you want to behave? How do you want to be perceived? If your sense of self is defined by your partner, a lack of self-satisfaction might be negatively impacting upon your relationship.

Make a list of all the sticky moments you can remember having had with your partner in the last year. Next to each instance, make a note of the personal dissatisfaction which may have contributed to your handling of the situation. Perhaps, for example, your partner came home late and the atmosphere was tense when they did. Was the cause of the tension their late return, or was it your feelings about it?

This exercise will shift the gears of your relationship lulls, and turn them into an opportunity for you to learn about yourself and affect personal change.

We're not saying you should search for your own fault in each and every instance though, because sometimes our partners just bore us or behave like buffoons. But a little self-reflection will do much to quell your frustration when the spark's running on low gas, and might just bring back a little long-lost softness.

Speak the unspeakable

Most couples find it hard to admit to each other that it's not all fireworks anymore, because they think it's an admission of ultimate failure. But talking to your partner about this prickly topic can generate a healthy open discourse about the realities of being in love, and relieve the pressure placed upon relationships by Hollywood's myopic portrayal of happily-ever-after. But how do you do it?

Sit down with your partner and talk to them.

Reminisce on the honeymoon period and the hot nights of passion by all means, but don't bemoan their passing, because mourning the absence of the 'spark' is setting yourself up for a struggle with reality.

Explain to your partner that such a hankering denies your relationship the essential flux and vulnerability which gives it texture, excitement and value.

You could even take this acceptance of romantic turbulence even further, by treating a dry patch as a positive thing.

Pioneering psychologist and philosopher William James said, 'Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.' Conflict itself, well handled, can actually strengthen your relationship. Arguably, then, a relationship without the odd rough patch cannot hope to grow.

Re-romanticise

We ramble on about the loss of the spark, the extinguishing of the flame, the end of the honeymoon, but these are all just metaphors for the way two people interact when things aren't peachy. So let's get to the bottom of what is actually going on, practically, within a relationship when that happens.

Couples counsellor and bestselling author of *Getting The Love You Want*, Harville Hendrix, defines the loss of the spark as an absence of caring behaviours you used to do for each other when you started going out, like cups of tea in bed, back massages on the sofa, stroking each other to sleep. And we think this is an important revelation, because behaviour is something you can change. Hendrix suggests that a gradual reintroduction of these caring behaviours will help you re-romanticise. Here's how to do it:

First, sit down with your partner, each with a separate sheet of paper and pen in hand. Each of you write on their paper what the other person currently does that pleases you, and what they used to do but what they might not do now.

Give each entry on your list a rating of how important that thing is to you, 1 being not so important, 5 being very important indeed.

Exchange lists with your partner, and start doing two or three things from your partner's list every day, regardless how you feel about doing it.

One of the many benefits this exercise can have, Hendrix tells us, is that it 'helps people erode the infantile belief that their partners can read their minds'. By actively telling our partners what we want, we cannot harbour that juvenile suspicion that they're secretly denying us what they know we want.

Create space

Ever heard someone in a relationship say things like 'I feel suffocated' or 'I'm trapped'? They feel a longing for something which they might not even be aware of, an absence of something which isn't quantifiable in any concrete sense; they lack space. What if the act of rekindling your relationship weren't really an act at all? What if it were more of an allowance, an accommodation? What if, instead of being there for your partner as a loving person, you could be there for them as space.

Lie or sit down with your partner and hold their hand. Both close your eyes and breathe normally. Focus on your breath and the sensations in your body – where it's touching other surfaces, where it's touching your partner. When thoughts pop into your head, simply notice them, and allow them to be there without getting caught up in them. Do this by staying focused on the breath. Do this for ten or so minutes every day, or as often as you can.

Be real

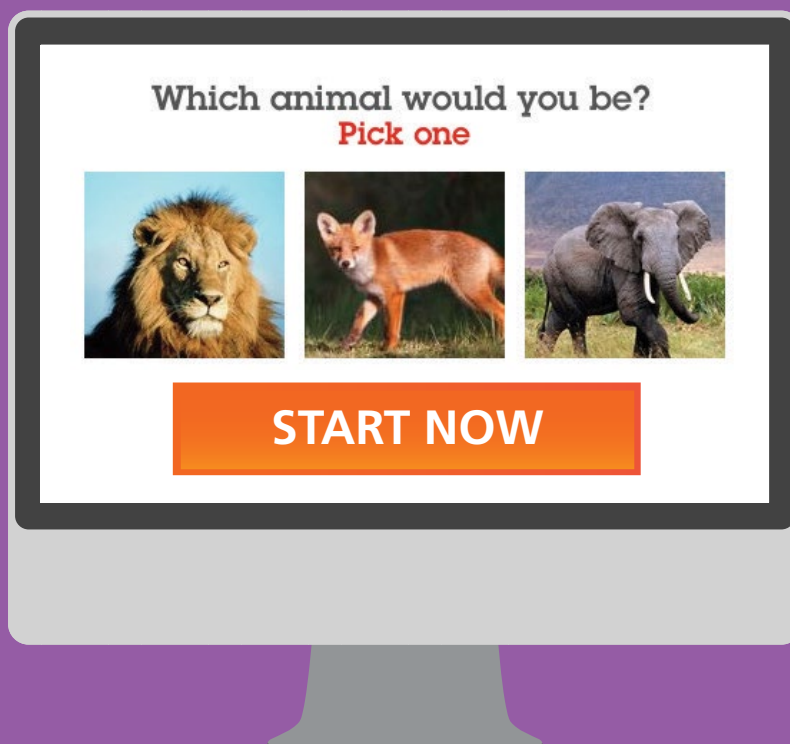
It's called commitment for a reason. You wouldn't have to 'commit' to an indulgent spa day once a month; you wouldn't have to 'commit' to a new designer wardrobe every season.

But relationships are more fluid than that. Sometimes you'll feel like you're soaring into the stratosphere on the wings of love, sometimes you won't. Try to let go of your preconceptions and make room for the inevitable highs and lows of your relationship.

Continue your journey

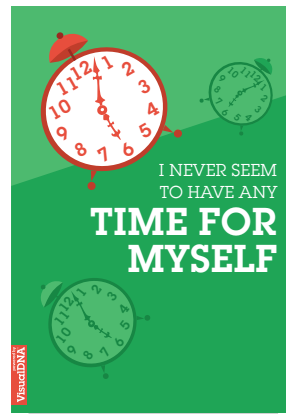
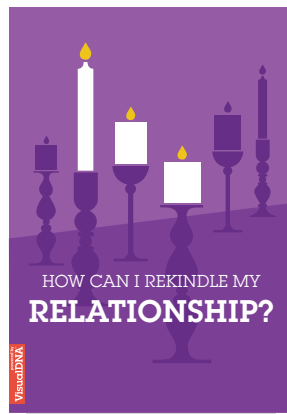
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