

Pillow Talk

Laurie Mintz Share Some Tips For Putting Romance Back Into Your Life



► Think candy and flowers are all you need to woo anew your beloved this Valentine's Day? In her one-on-one interview with KRCG-TV's Mark Slavit, **relationship expert Laurie Mintz** says you'd better think again.

Do you have any suggestions on how to make Valentine's Day more romantic?

I do, but it's probably not the answer that you're expecting because it doesn't involve candy and flowers. It involves making every day Valentine's Day. People need to make every day a commitment to their relationship. Rather than flowers, the best gift that you can give is the commitment to say something loving and appreciative to your partner every day. You also need to touch them affectionately every day.

So often in long-term relationships, the pressures of work, bills, kids and jobs occur. Sometimes, a couple ends up sharing the chores of life and actually forgets to appreciate each other every day and to touch each other

Laurie, I'm told you are a sex and romance expert. What allows you to say that about yourself?

I am an associate professor of counseling psychology at the University of Missouri. I'm a licensed psychologist in private practice here in Columbia. My expertise is in relationships, both general and sexual.

Why do you consider yourself a sex expert?

I write about the topic. I do research on the topic. I see clients in my private practice. I see couples and individuals for sex therapy. Sex is one very important part of romance and love in relationships.

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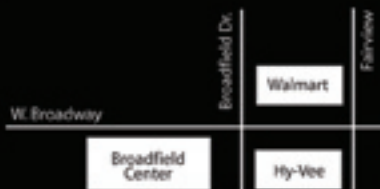


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affectionately every day. The best gift you can give is to not place so much emphasis on Valentine's Day, but to place emphasis on your relationship every day of the year.

How do you know what your partner wants?

Talk to them. So many times, we give each other what we think the other person wants instead of asking them what they want. There are two myths behind that. One is the idea that you shouldn't have to ask, that it means less if you have to ask. Some women say, "he should just know." Expecting your partner to know what you want without you telling them is a sure-fire way not to get what you want. If you think asking for what you want is unromantic, think how much worse it is to not ever have a chance to get what you want. You only know if you ask.

The other common idea is giving what *we* want rather than what *they* want. I love goopy greeting cards with loving, romantic notes. I like my husband to give me those. He hates those. If I would give him one of those, he would say, "Oh my gosh, you spent three bucks on a piece of paper!"

What is the basis of a good relationship?

I would say communication is the bedrock of a good relationship. Communication makes your bed rock. Communication is the key to a good everyday relationship and sexual relationship. You have to be able to talk about your relationship and sex at the kitchen table like you would anything else.

In your writings, you said spontaneous sex is a myth. What do you mean by that?

It's a complete and total myth. It's one that people in our culture buy into. "Sex should be spontaneous" is something I hear quite a bit. The word "spontaneous" means without planning. Even in early sexuality, everything is planned. Everything is orchestrated.

I ask people to think back when things were the most romantic in their relationship. Did it just happen? No, you got dressed up, you sprayed on perfume and you flirted all night. Sexuality was still anticipated and planned for. It was sometimes done so well that we mistook that for spontaneity, but it's not.



Some couples tell me the spontaneity is gone in their relationships. What is gone is the opportunity. I tell married couples to have trysts. A tryst is a planned meeting of two lovers. Married couples can have trysts, too. If married couples wait for spontaneity, they may never have sex. If they plan and anticipate it with a well-orchestrated tryst, it brings the romance back.

How do you define a loving, committed relationship?

Those relationships involve romance, in terms of affection. It involves sexual touch on a daily basis. It involves all kinds of romantic encounters and sexual encounters. Many couples stop sexually touching each other, unless there's time to finish the deed. When you think back on your courting days, there was a lot of affection and sexual touch where there was no question that it wouldn't lead to intercourse.

Sex is the glue that holds the relationship together, but it's also the oil at the same time. It's a lubricant in life that makes things go smoother. Sex makes couples less snippy with each other and more affectionate and open.

What advice do you have for couples that have a hard time reliving their youthful days of affection and touching?

They can start by giving each other the best Valentine's Day present ever. They can make a commitment of saying one appreciative thing to each other every day. Let's make sure we touch each other affectionately every day. Let's integrate sexual touching in our lives on a daily basis that isn't expected

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to lead anywhere. All of that together will actually help the couple get more interested in a romantic and sexual relationship again.

Can sexually touching be something as innocent as holding hands?

That's exactly right. Holding hands, kissing, putting your hand on your partner's thigh are perfect examples. These are things that most couples used to do all of the time. The important thing is integrating sexual touch into your daily life that isn't expected to lead to intercourse right then and there in the moment.

Are there inappropriate times for these displays of affection?

Many women tell me they are doing the dinner dishes "and he comes up and he gropes me." These women complain this is not a turn on. They can't understand why he doesn't know it's not a turn on. His response is usually, "I'm just trying to play like we used to."

It's sort of an evolution in the relationship. In the beginning, she would have turned around and played back. Later in the relationship many women respond by saying, "I'm doing the dishes! Leave me alone!" Communication allows you to find out what kind of touch is appropriate and when it should happen in one's daily life.

What is the biggest sexual problem facing couples today?

Some couples reach a point in their relationship where the only time they touch each other is when they can actually have intercourse. One client told me, "that's like going from an ice cube to boiling water." You can't do that. You have to have sexual, affectionate touch and loving statements integrated throughout your day. Every day is foreplay. It's part of everyday life.

How can couples overcome a communication breakdown when it comes to sex?

We are not expected to talk about sex in many parts of today's culture. Some say it's taboo. So many people are uncomfortable talking about it. There are some great books that can help couples with communication. There is also therapy. If couples are having problems, sexual or otherwise,

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You certainly have a right to ask for behaviors that you want from your spouse.

I recommend couples therapy. It is a wonderful resource and a wonderful way to get things back on track and to work things out. A therapist not only helps you with problems; a therapist can teach you some communication skills to use in your everyday life.

How do you deal with people who don't like romance?

I rarely have had anyone sit down and say, "he's never been romantic and I knew that when I got married" or "she was never affectionate." I usually hear that some change has occurred. Some people are more affectionate and verbal than others. People can change. You don't want to ask your partner to change into someone they are not. Compromise and communication are essential in a committed, loving relationship. You do have the right to ask directly for something you would like. You could ask your partner to touch you affectionately more often or tell you that you are appreciated. Those are behaviors rather than character traits. You certainly have a right to ask for behaviors that you want from your spouse.

Is there a simple way to help a fizzling relationship?

Spend time together. Make sure you have quality time while organizing life's tasks. We can't say something is important and not spend time on it. I don't mean just sexual time. Go on a date. Go dancing. Go do something fun and new together. Go do something you used to like to do. Just spend time together.

Coordinate your time with planning. I recommend that couples sit down on a weekly or monthly basis to coordinate the tasks of life together. When you organize who gets the groceries, picks up the kids and other life tasks, then you can arrange more quality time together. ■

Photos By L.G. Patterson

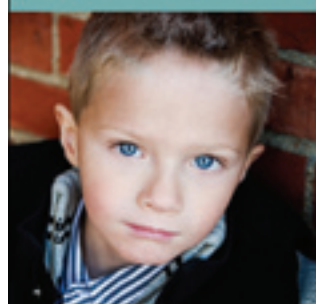


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