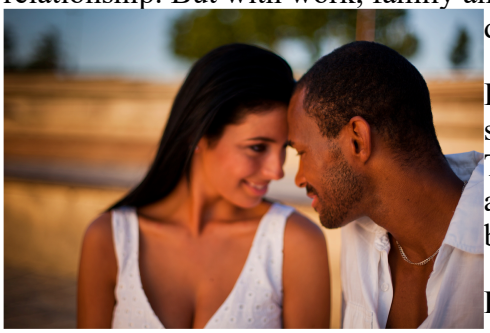
Squeezing in your main squeeze: making time for your relationship

Most experts agree that spending quality time with your partner is an essential ingredient for a lasting relationship. But with work, family and a billion other things on your plate, finding time is easier said than done. Here are a few easy ways to squeeze in more time for each other:



Plan ahead. It may not be "romantic" or "spontaneous" but there's something to be said for direct scheduling. Why not pencil in a standing Thursday night dinner date or free up Sunday afternoons for a fun activity together—whether it's a movie, a day trip or some (ahem) bedroom time?

Debrief daily. Take 15 minutes at the end of each day to sit down with your partner and share each other's experiences, successes and frustrations. This simple habit can help you slow down and stay connected in today's high-speed world.

Turn chore time into together time. From grocery shopping to house cleaning, the average person spends hours alone running errands and finishing household chores. Why not crank up the music, tackle those tasks together instead, and make that "to do" list much more enjoyable? If resentment is growing because you're constantly picking up after your mate, it may be time to consider hiring a cleaner—many couples swear it's a relationship rescuer.

Plug in. Use technology and your downtime opportunities to stay connected. Share a quick phone update during a coffee break or commute. If a live conversation isn't possible, take a few moments to send a quick email, text or voicemail to your partner to let your loved one know he or she is on your mind. Any form of quality communication is always better than none at all.

Couples & Conflict: Tips for Dealing with Routine Relationship Disagreements

When two people come together with different personalities, habits, beliefs and expectations, disagreements are inevitable. Work through quarrels to build a stronger, healthier relationship by:

Speaking your mind. Clearly and openly communicate your feelings and concerns with your partner and encourage him or her to do the same. Before you can resolve an issue, you need to know where both of you stand.

Opening your ears. In heated disagreements, it's easy to tune out your mate or react without really listening. Resist this temptation, take a deep breath and really tune in to your partner's concerns. Understanding and empathy can help diffuse conflict and reach a solution faster.

Uncovering the real issues. Sometimes small disagreements are actually about a larger relationship issue. An argument over one partner's late night out with friends might really be about trust, communication or a lack of quality time together. Look inwards to explore what your feelings and the fights are really about, then calmly and openly deal with them together.

Not aiming to win. A healthy relationship is based on compromise and understanding, not on one person coming out ahead. Look for mutually beneficial solutions to strengthen the relationship going forward.

Working towards a concrete resolution. For example, "spend more time together as a couple" is too general and undefined to create real change. Instead, you might resolve to take up golf together or schedule a set "date night" each week.

Sage Advice: Wisdom from Couples with Decades of Experience

Clear the air. Be upfront with your partner about your needs and expectations in the relationship and speak your mind early on when something is bothering you. Don't avoid conflict – openly work through it and treat disagreements as a chance to improve the relationship.

Spend time apart. Maintain a social life outside of your relationship and continue to enjoy the hobbies and interests you don't share with your partner.

Express your love. Many long-time couples report it's the small things that pack the most punch. Send a love note or text, bring home flowers or simply tell your partner how much they are loved and appreciated.

Relationships by the Numbers

- The average age for a first marriage is 30.2 years for grooms and 28.2 years for brides.
- 15.5% of Canadian families live common law.
- About four in 10 Canadian marriages end in divorce, however;
- A belief that marriage is symbolic of commitment is the number one reason why couples tie the knot.
- In 2006 there were 45,300 same sex couples in Canada. 7,500 (16.5%) of these were married couples while 37,900 (83.5%) were common-law couples.