

The Surprise Factor

We all love it when our beloved does something nice for us, like a love note, a back rub, small gift or taking us on a date. These small gestures are so important in communicating our love to each other and are vital to sustaining a vibrant relationship.

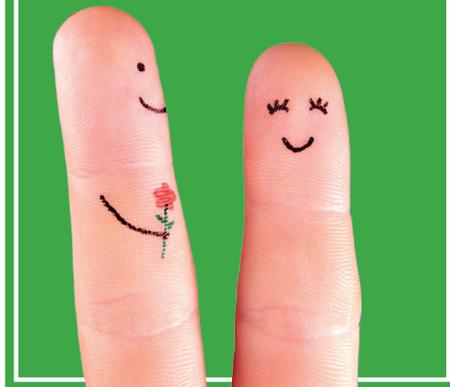
Recent research has demonstrated that the impact in the brain of such gestures is increased when there is an element of unpredictability. In other words, surprise is a great way to amplify your couple fun! Instead of your favourite restaurant, try a twilight picnic or an exotic food type you've never eaten before. Instead of texting a love message, send a video message, coded message or voice message in an accent.

With a bit of thought, there are so many ways to add the 'surprise factor'! Increase the impact of your romantic gestures by adding a dash of surprise and you'll keep the romance thriving.

How's your playfulness?

When was the last time you...

- ... laughed together?
- ... surprised your beloved with something nice?
- ... were curious about the other's thoughts on a topic?
- ... day-dreamed about your beloved?
- ... danced or sang together?

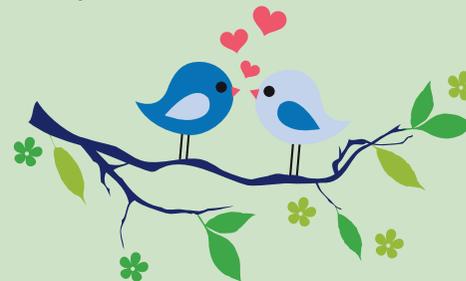


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St Valentine | Feb 14

Although not on the universal Church calendar, St Valentine is celebrated throughout the world as the patron of romance and married love. He was a Roman priest who was executed for marrying couples against the orders of the Emperor Claudius II. While in prison, he healed the sight of his jailor's young daughter, and on the eve of his execution, reportedly penned her a note signing it, 'from your Valentine'.



Couple Fun!

Why is it that when we grow up, we forget about the joys and benefits of having fun?

Counsellors and educators often talk about the importance of fun in a marriage, but for those of us raising families; 'couple fun' is usually the first casualty in the busy family schedule. After all, now that we are parents, we're supposed to be responsible, right?

Fun stimulates the brain and regenerates us – something we all need in a busy life loaded with meetings and responsibilities. But we're not just talking about any kind of fun. Lots of couples have scheduled fun activities for their individual pursuits, or family activity time, but rarely have fun **together** as a couple.

All marriages have times of struggle and when they do one of the notable absences is couple fun; neither seem to enjoy each other as much as they used to. As a result, they often seek their 'fun-fix' outside the relationship. This is a set up for mishap as the ability to have fun together is an important bonding experience. If all your fun is associated with someone other than your spouse, you'll be at risk of further undermining the marriage.

Couple Fun Benefits

Couple fun might seem indulgent but it's more important for couples than we think; it helps us to develop valuable virtues. For example:

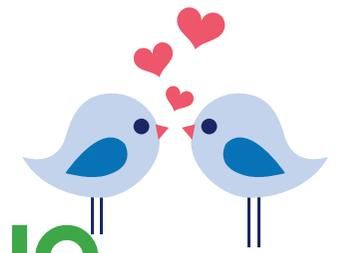
- 1. A sense of humour** encourages laughter which stimulates the biochemistry associated with wellbeing. It can turn a negative event into a positive bonding experience and helps us overcome frustrations that otherwise might leave us feeling resentful towards each other. A good dose of laughter is like a healing balm.
- 2. Curiosity** is a vital ingredient in keeping our love fresh, vibrant and open to growth. Couples who let themselves believe that they already know everything about each other, tend to lose interest in each other. They become stagnant and bored with each other and begin to look for stimulation elsewhere. Couple fun fosters curiosity by creating opportunities to discover new aspects of each other.
- 3. Acceptance** flourishes when we laugh at ourselves because it requires us to step back and look at the bigger picture. This helps us to be more accepting of each other's limitations, more forgiving and also more humble.
- 4. Downtime** together is critical for any successful marriage and couple fun is a great way of creating some enjoyable downtime together in our otherwise too busy and serious lives.

Couple fun helps us **develop a bank of positive memories** upon which we can draw during the inevitable tough times in a marriage.

"We remember fondly our newlywed years, when we were setting up our first home and doing all the decorating and furniture refurbishing ourselves.... and on a very tight budget! It was great fun and helped us build a sense of 'we'. When the newly-hung wallpaper began to peel because we were too thorough in squeezing out the excess glue, we were able to laugh about it instead of blaming each other." - Jen



Tips for Couple Fun



1. Daily Rituals.

Busyness and stress are ever present realities but don't let them dictate the mood of your relationship. Consciously choose to form simple daily habits that bring a light-hearted tone to your marriage. Short love notes or text messages, lighting candles at dinner or singing to music while you wash dishes together. With a bit of imagination you can infuse your daily routine with romantic fun.

2. Date Night.

When life is busy, if it's not in the schedule, it just doesn't happen. Prefer to be spontaneous? Spontaneity is the domain of those with spare time! If you don't have spare time, you can't afford spontaneity. Plan a time and plan an activity even if it's as simple as walking around the block or sitting on the floor listening to your favourite music together.

3. Find a common interest.

You may be passionate about craft or golf or body building or photography. That's great, but if it's not shared, you need to limit your time investment. Look for a recreational activity you both enjoy and invest in it. Recreational companionship is a valuable bonding activity and a common hobby is something that will provide years of couple fun.

"Our marriage was struggling. We'd been arguing quite a bit and it just wasn't fun being with each other anymore. In fact, I began to dread the weekends when there really wasn't any excuse not to be together. I think we were both beginning to wonder about the future of our marriage. Then one day I was cleaning up and I came across a photo album from our dating times. I put it aside, thinking I should file it when my wife spotted it. As she flipped the pages, I couldn't resist joining her. Some of those pictures brought back the funniest memories and soon we were reliving them and laughing so hard my eyes watered. Three hours and eight albums later we knew that there was hope for us". - Brian