



# Keeping the LOVE ALIVE

Are you with Mr or Mrs Right but feel the romance has gone stale? Adele Rosi finds out how to relight the fire

**T**here's nothing like the first flush of love...when everything about the world seems right, your beloved can do no wrong and you can't keep your hands off each other. The possibility of ever falling out of love is unimaginable. Fast forward, a year or three and, although you may still love the one you're with, you find the way he never tidies up after himself annoying and the fact that she shaves her legs with your razor is disgusting. Add into the mix a hectic work schedule, a full social life and maybe a couple of children and the time you once devoted exclusively to your partner may be thin on the ground. As for sex, you'd rather get a good night's sleep than trip the light fantastic. In short, that glorious spark, the heady, intoxicating rush of excitement, the almost desperate need to spend time with each other may no longer be as prominent, if there at all.

But don't despair. According to Julie Gallinat, a licensed clinical social worker and certified Imago relationship therapist, this is completely normal.

"It happens to everyone," explains Gallinat. "There are three relationship stages, two of which nearly all relationships go through. The first, Romantic Love, occurs when you fall in love. During this stage, a series of brain chemicals, natural amphetamines, are released to bring about a delightfully positive attitude, euphoria, increased energy and libido, a decreased need for sleep and a loss of appetite. Everything and everyone seem amazing, even a lover's quirks can seem adorable. But with a relatively short self life—anywhere from a few days to a few months—these chemicals wear off."

When this happens, you enter the second stage of the relationship, what Gallinat terms "The Power Struggle". The comedown may be devastating and marked by feelings of disillusionment, anger, frustration and disappointment. You may

feel that you have made the wrong choice, that the other person has changed, or that he or she is not "The One". Without as many feel-good chemicals surging through your veins, desire returns to previous levels and you begin to see the other person in a fuller light. This stage of a relationship can either last a lifetime or spell the end of it. Some couples learn to accommodate and accept each other's quirks and differences while others might harbor resentment to the detriment of the relationship.

"Certain couples are lucky enough to enter into the third stage of a relationship, a stage that is marked by intentionality and curiosity," says Gallinat. "They begin to notice the patterns, the repetition from one argument to another or from one partner to another, and they get curious and ask, 'What is going on here?'"

She advocates that people need to understand that adult relationships are not solely about feeling good, but rather they are about growth, maturity and compassion—and couples often need assistance in learning how to cultivate that.

"It is very common to have people saying to each other 'If only you would change' but both parties have contributed to where things are in the relationship. As much as they would like to be 100 percent compatible, it isn't possible because incompatibility is necessary for each person's growth," she explains. "Couples need to acknowledge their differences and find out more about what those differences reflect. It's not about finding compromise; it's about learning to appreciate the differences and that is difficult for most. To have a deeply satisfying relationship where one feels joy, passion and emotional safety, couples need to consciously focus on developing relational skills. Like a golf swing or even parenting, it is something that doesn't necessarily come naturally. You have to educate yourself to learn how to look more deeply into the relationship and its patterns in order to find out why something

keeps happening the way it does. Although we can't blame our parents, our frame of reference and the relationship skills we use are a reflection of our experience with our primary caregivers; they are the ones who taught us how to love and how to be loved."

Couples can experience difficulties wherever they are in the world but Gallinat believes that living in Hong Kong and Asia throws up its own obstacles that need to be surmounted.

"The two main challenges to a relationship in Hong Kong are distance and availability," she says. "People work incredibly hard here and they travel frequently on business. They don't naturally have enough time but they also don't make time to concentrate on their relationship. So to fill the 'need' gap (the need for pleasure, joy, relaxation, connection, etc.) they might sneak out for a quick fix. And it is very hard for people in an affair to give that up because they are recapturing the intense feelings of Romantic Love, something they may no longer be experiencing with their long-term partner.

"My main point is that people need to make their relationship a priority, a project. The more time you invest in something, the more rewards you reap and the less likely you will be to be attracted to potentially destructive temptations."

To this end—and every couple operates differently—limits may need to be placed around work, the Blackberry may have to be

switched off for a certain period and a date night scheduled in the diary in order to spend quality time together. Gallinat stresses the need to include non-sexual, physical time and, although there are no hard-and-fast rules for domestic bliss, she offers 10 tips on how to improve your intimate relationship. (See sidebar.)

And then, of course, there's sex.

"Those surveys about how much sex you should be having each week are bunk," laughs Gallinat. "It is definitely an important part of a relationship but if what is happening is fine with both people in a couple—if you're not having frequent sex because you're both too tired—then that's OK. If one of the two is not happy with the quality and frequency of sex they are having (or not having), then it's a problem. And when other things aren't going well in a relationship, sex always becomes an issue."

The frequency or lack of sex is often linked to the various stages in life, at which you find yourself, and which can take a toll on your desire. If you're young, free and single, it may be your whole *raison d'être*. If you've just had a baby or have a young family, it might be the last thing you fancy doing.

"When it comes to sex in a long-term relationship, one of the most crucial elements in keeping the spark alive is communication. If we don't talk about what we like or don't like, or want more of, it becomes routine and the passion dies," says Gallinat. "We need to

keep the novelty alive, explore new ways [of making love] and focus on having fun, connecting and developing a deeper sense of who each other is and what each desires."

If you're not sure that you're on the right track, seeing a therapist might be the answer. Although it is rare for couples who are in a good place to consult her, Gallinat believes it never hurts to learn as much as you can about your other half. What is critical, however, is finding a professional to talk to when you feel as though you're getting stuck in patterns of arguing, feeling hurt or resentment.

"Don't put off coming to see a therapist until your relationship is hanging by a thread," she says. "We often try to address issues by ourselves and that's fine but we tend to address what's on the surface—we don't go deeper—and that's what people require help with. You need somebody not involved in the relationship to figure out what the underlying issues are. I have been married for 30 years and that has become my highest qualification. I've learned a lot on the ground and I do know how hard it is. But if you get professional help sooner rather than later, you stand a good chance of experiencing real love and becoming a strong unit."



## About Julie Gallinat

Julie Gallinat is a licensed clinical social worker and certified Imago relationship therapist, specializing in marriage and family relationships. Much of her work addresses issues related to communication and relationships, family discord, parenting, conflict and anger management, relocation adjustment, grief and loss, stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem and self-image. She offers individual, couple and family consultations but also runs frequent workshops. **Contact her on 9191-7045, email [info@juliegallinat.com](mailto:info@juliegallinat.com) or visit [www.juliegallinat.com](http://www.juliegallinat.com).** If you sign up for her newsletter, you can read an extended version of the following tips.





## Top 10 Tips for keeping your love alive

### 1 INCREASE NON-SEXUAL PHYSICAL CONDUCT

Physical touch relieves stress; it makes us happier and healthier and communicates love, care and affection. To increase this, try holding hands or giving him/her a spontaneous hug and a kiss.

### 2 VOICE YOUR APPRECIATION

Even in times of difficulty, there is something to appreciate in your partner. The challenge is noticing and then giving voice to it.

### 3 INSTITUTE A WEEKLY DATE NIGHT

Spending time alone to connect as a couple is essential for a strong relationship. Set aside a night a week to focus on each other.

### 4 HAVE FUN

Spending time where there is laughter and joy builds a sense of safety and connection. Fun can take whatever form you choose.

### 5 SURPRISE YOUR PARTNER

Surprising your partner can be a bit tricky but if you listen closely, you may hear him/her dropping subtle hints such as having a lie-in at the weekend. Step up to make that wish come true.

### 6 MAKE DAILY VERBAL CONTACT

Text or a call your partner out of the blue purely to see how they are. Try it out three times a week for a month and see what happens.

### 7 LEARN YOUR PARTNER'S "LOVE LANGUAGE"

Everyone has a different love language that hits the mark and to which they respond. Your partner's love language might differ from yours. The five "Love Languages" are:

**AFFIRMATION/ WORDS:** verbal compliments; appreciation; praise

**ATTENTION/QUALITY TIME:** doing something enjoyable and interactive together;

**ACTION/ACTS OF SERVICE:** acts of kindness done with loving attitude

**AFFECTION/PHYSICAL TOUCH:** loving (never abusive) physical contact

**APPRECIATION/GIFTS:** gifts of any size, shape, color or price

### 8 SAY "I LOVE YOU" OFTEN

It is important to remind our partners that we love them and we still need to hear those three little words on a regular basis.

### 9 MAKE LOVING EYE CONTACT

Eye contact is a golden opportunity to have a powerful non-verbal connection. Do this during a meal or before bedtime.

### 10 THE 5:1 PRINCIPLE

If you say or do something hurtful towards your partner, recreate the balance of harmony by following that negative action with five positive ones.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- **Getting The Love You Want** by Harville Hendrix
- **Getting The Sex You Want** by Tammy Nelson
- **The Truth About Love** by Patricia Love
- **Hot Monogamy** by Patricia Love
- **The Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work** by John Gottman
- **The Five Love Languages** by Garry Chapman

