

TEN WAYS TO RENEW YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

By Larry Nisan, M.Ed.
(with the help of my partner and friend, E. Wolff, M.D.)

The Human Being is a creative individual. Accordingly, each one of us is capable of creating many excuses for an event we know need not be occurring – rocky relationships. Yet, because of our own personal discouragement, we try to explain away this event rather than taking effective action.

This booklet is designed for each INDIVIDUAL to read – because the most frequent and useless excuse is that it is the “other person’s” fault. Rather than looking for faults, excuses, and blame, let’s seek constructive ACTION alternatives!

1. CATCH YOURSELF LOOKING FOR EXCUSES

It is all too easy to explain away a discouraging relationship which we choose not to face. Instead, we say “It’s financial pressures” or “It’s my in-laws” or “I never did get along with the opposite sex”, or ... or ... or... ⁵

Rather than finding excuses, stop yourself and say, “Am I avoiding the opportunity to DO something about this relationship by finding excuses?”

2. BE AN ENCOURAGER

We live in a “mistake-centred society” ². We have learned from early childhood how to expose what is wrong with others and with ourselves. Consider the possibilities if we spent as much time and energy exposing what is RIGHT in our partner. We could initiate conversations with “I’m really pleased that you...” or... or... or.... Also, perhaps it is time we learned how to accept a compliment from someone else without retorting, “Yes, but...” (either said out loud or to ourselves – it is still a defeating statement)

3. BE AN ESTEEM-BUILDER ⁶

What a wonderful feeling it is when someone demonstrates to us that they love us just the way we are – not because we do something right but simply because we are loveable! Imagine if we were to use all our creativity to find times when we can and do show that we love our partner just because we do. Sometimes we can do it non-verbally – a hug, a pat, a smile. Sometimes it needs to be said – “I love you.”

4. SET YOUR OWN LIFE IN ORDER

For constructive human growth to occur, we need to maximize all the many strengths in our personality. All too often we seek, instead, to discover where the other person requires improvement. If each of us spent as much time in self-improvement, who could resist us? Seriously, though, it is fruitless to find shortcomings in others because it is only they who can improve their own lot. If, instead, we concentrate on maintaining our own strengths while developing areas needing more improvement, then and only then, will our labours bear fruit.

5. TAKE THE FIRST STEP

The “waiting game” has no winner. When we first got married, it was a “leap of faith”³ in that we could not foretell what would befall us. Yet, because of our love, we chose to commit ourselves to a lifetime with another person. This “leap of faith” must be made over and over again. We must continue to believe in our relationship, in the other person, and in ourselves, regardless of the difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, the irony of life is that when we need to make this leap most urgently (i.e. when faced with marital discord), that is the time we find it most difficult to do so. Accordingly, we need to consciously state to ourselves, “This is the time to have the courage to make the leap”. Taking the first step in enriching a marriage does mean taking a risk, but then, wasn’t making this lifetime commitment in the first place the greatest of risks?

6. GIVE WHAT YOU WANT TO GET⁴

When you want to be hugged – hug! When you want kindness and gentleness – be kind and gentle! When you want to be left alone for a bit – respect the other person’s privacy!

Giving what you want to get is the non-authoritarian hint. It is not a demand, but rather, the most gentle of suggestions.

7. LISTEN!

Simple to suggest but hard to do! We become so engrossed in making our own point understood that we fail to really hear what the other person is saying. The “Marriage Conference” format (as proposed by William Pew M.D.⁷), offers an opportunity to start to learn how to listen. This involves each partner speaking for a period of time without interruption by the other person. At the end of this period of time (usually ½ hour), the roles are switched and the other person speaks for half an hour. Basic rules are: a) no interruptions (e.g.: phone calls, children etc.); b) go by the clock in deciding the time limits; c) silence by the speaker is allowed and to be expected; d) do not shorten or lengthen the agreed upon time limit during the conference.

It is suggested that a marriage conference be scheduled and held at least once per week. (N.B.: There are 168 hours in a week. Is it so much to ask that 1/168th of these be spent in listening to one another?!)

8. TAKE AND/OR MAKE TIME FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In the hectic pace of contemporary living we sometimes forget that there are priorities among life's tasks. Sometimes, in fact, we make our pace of living more hectic than need be in order to avoid certain tasks in life. Therefore, we must take time to be with the person we love and if we feel ourselves "run by our schedule" then we must make time within our schedule for our relationship. If need be, make appointments to be with the one we love.

It has been hypothesized that marriage survival is a factor of how much time we spend with our loved one exclusive of others. Make time to be alone together. If you are only together at parties, family outings, work, etc., then you may just as easily be avoiding your relationship. We need that time together... alone.

9. BE NON-JUDGMENTAL

Sometimes we seem preoccupied with counting, weighing or measuring that which cannot be counted, weighed, or measured. Can I count how often I feel loved? Can I weigh the amount of love I get? How could I measure the breadth of love I feel?

Why enter into such a pointless exercise?! Instead, accept the love that is given. Cherish that feeling of love for the many ways this love can be demonstrated.

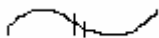
10. BE A LOVER NOT A TRAINER

I have never as yet heard a marriage vow that included "To love, honour, and teach...". Yet, without the permission of the other, we may feel it our responsibility to "train" them in the "correct" (which often means "our") ways.

Accordingly, we alienate ourselves from the other person by:

1. *excusing our own behaviour in view of their "greater" mistakes;*
 2. *denying what abilities they do possess;*
 3. *not showing love and affection because the other person might mistakenly view this as a sign of condoning their behaviour;*
 4. *not setting our own life in order (as we are so busy setting their life in order);*
 5. *not taking the first step (as the other person has so many more steps to take);*
- Also, perhaps it is time we realize that we don't have to "perform" to be loveable. Why not accept that by our mere existence as human beings we are inherently loveable?
6. *Demanding our needs to be met (as our needs seem so much more important);*
 7. *Not listening (because what we have to say is so much more important);*

8. *Not taking time for the relationship (as the other person has so much more to do first);*
9. *Judging the other person (because we know better);*
10. *Training the other person (instead of loving them).*



There are no useful excuses for not doing something about marital discord ourselves as individuals. With all our schooling, never have we been taught how to be a responsible love partner. We have never been taught how to be a responsible love partner. We have never been taught how to achieve intimacy with another human being. And we have never learned how to live in a relationship of two equals – equal in value and worth as human beings. Hopefully, these ten alternatives will be a start towards the learning of the true basics of life – Responsibility, Intimacy, and Equality.

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Published by the Psychotherapy Institute where the author is Executive Director as well as Marriage and Family Counsellor. For further information or copies, write to:

Psychotherapy Institute
120 Carlton St.
Suite 203, Toronto
Canada, M5A 4K2

Or via e-mail, at: psyinst@on.aibn.com

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