

Where's my "happily-ever-after"?

It's no fairytale. Nor is it a Hollywood movie. "Happily ever after" is hardly ever as happy as you'd imagined it. Relationships are difficult; they need work and lots of it. If you neglect it, or think it should all magically fall into place, you're in for a big (and perhaps nasty!) surprise. Here are some tips on how to nurture your relationship.

In real life, the prince can be an ogre, the princess can be moody and there's always work to be done in the castle. In fact, sometimes it feels more like a horror story than a fairytale.

But there's no need to fall victim to harsh reality. Your relationship can be magical again. Of course, you can't expect it to change at the wave of a magic wand. It requires nurturing and hard work, and lots of it. Here is some fairy dust to aid you in your quest:

- **Do a Daily Temperature Reading (DTR).** Developed by Virginia Satir, one of the key figures in the development of family therapy, using this method demonstrates your desire for the relationship to succeed. Take time to write down the following each day (or which interval works best for you) and exchange it with your partner:
 - **Appreciations.** Whatever you feel good about, let your partner know. When you see something in your partner you appreciate, express it with words and gestures
 - **New Information.** Intimacy thrives only when both partners know what is going on in each other's lives. It may be related to work, family, gossip, fears, interest, anything and everything, trivial and important, that helps keep your partner up on your state, mood and generally, what's going on in your life
 - **Puzzles.** If there are things you don't understand that your partner could clarify, ask for clarification
 - **Complaints with Requests for Change.**
No personal attacks and judgements. Romance may thrive on mystery, but intimacy doesn't. Try this format: "When you..., I feel..., What I want instead is..."
 - **Wishes, Hopes, and Dreams.**
If your expectations are different from mine, it doesn't make one of us noble and the other not. The more we can be aware of these expectations and talk about them, the more possibility there is that we will reach some middle ground
 - When you want to talk about something that is bothering you, **be careful how you start the discussion.** Using "I" messages, state your problem gently so the other person will be more likely to listen



- **Don't utter every mean remark** that comes to mind. Studies show that couples who avoid saying every angry thought when discussing touchy subjects are the happiest
- **Be willing to be influenced** by the other. Don't get annoyed or offended by requests to change, or positive criticism.
- **Stop arguments before they get completely out of control.** Try saying something caring; making it clear you're on common ground ("This is not your problem; it's our problem."); yielding because you think it's the best thing to do; tossing in some humour, and offering signs appreciation for your partner and his/ feelings along the way
- **Kiss and make up.** A willingness to make up after an argument is central to a happy relationship. Even if attempts to make repairs are clumsy, each partner should try
- **Welcome and integrate change.** A commitment is a vow to stay together, not to stay the same. Discuss the wishes, hopes, beliefs and dreams you've listed and try to adjust your relationship accordingly
- **Be sexually considerate** of each other. Be affectionate. Remember that your sex drives may be different
- **Be positive and optimistic.** In a happy relationship, couples make five times as many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship, than negative ones
- **Talk to each other.** Your partner can't read your mind, even though you want him or her to. Be clear about what you want to say, and listen twice as much as you talk
- **Spend time together.** Make time to have fun together. It may mean giving up some activities, scaling down at work, or asking your mother-in-law to baby-sit once a month so you can go away for the weekend
- All couples have as many as ten **issues they will never resolve.** If you switch partners, you'll just get ten new issues, and they are likely to be more complicated the second time around. A better choice might be to continually work on those issues yourself, or with the help of a counsellor
- **Seek help early** if either person is dissatisfied. The average couple waits six years before going to couples counselling. That's a long time to be unhappy!



Once the earth-shattering, butterfly-in-the-stomach phase of falling in love is over, you may think your relationship is lacking something. In reality, this is a natural progression, and is replaced by something much deeper and much more satisfying. If you put in what you want out, there'll be nothing more rewarding. So roll up those sleeves and really pull your weight!

