

Caring Days

Like other couples experiencing difficulties in their relationship, you may have discovered that not only are you experiencing more conflict and negative feelings, but you are also missing the more positive things in your relationship; the things you used to do to show you cared for each other. The conflicts you face must eventually be resolved, but it is also important to work on other smaller steps toward change that can help make a difference in your relationship now, by focusing on increasing the positivity in your relationship. One way to do this is with "Caring Days."

The key to making this activity successful is that each of you must be willing to make these investments, independent of each other's behavior. You must be committed to doing this, irrespective of each other's gestures or lack thereof. This allows an emphasis on your partner's good will, positive motivation, and desire to improve the relationship, rather than an emphasis on what each of you stand to gain personally by cooperating with your partner.

How To Get Started:

For this activity you must both answer the question, "Exactly what would I like my partner to do as a means of showing that s/he cares for me?"

Your answers to this question must be:

1. Positive
2. Specific
3. Small behaviors that can be done at least once daily
4. *Not* the subject of recent conflict

For example, "Please ask me how I spent my day" would be a good answer because it is positive, specific and small. "Don't ignore me so much" would not be good, because it is negative and vague.

The list you create together should contain at least 18 items because:

1. You will both be contributing, and some behaviors may have more significance to one partner than the other
2. Some items may be more relevant/feasible on some days than others
3. A large set of diverse items will help stimulate creativity and avoid stereotypical, monotonous behaviors
4. Your interests may shift over time

Once your list is complete, the requesting partner should state precisely what, when, and how s/he wants the other partner to respond and the partner who will be doing it should ask for clarification if necessary.

Doing the Caring Days Activity:

Now that you have your list, each partner should commit to doing at least 5 things daily. Remember, for this to work it is important that you commit to doing this and follow through, irrespective of your partner's gestures.

To help keep track of your progress, create a chart with 3 columns where the requests are in the middle of the sheet and each partner has his/her name to either the left or right of the requests. The person receiving the caring gesture will record on the sheet the date which they benefitted from the other partner's gesture.