

Love Connection

Get connected. Stay Connected



closecompanions.org

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About Close Companions



Close Companions is a program of Better Marriages, founded by David and Vera Mace in 1973.

At the core of our method is our Companionship Model: the idea that you and your partner are equals. You are a team and you both carry equal weight in your relationship, including maintaining it and growing it.

We have developed a series of self-paced online courses in the [Online Relationship Academy](#) proven to help you and your partner build the skills you need to navigate the challenges life brings - so that you grow stronger together, rather than further apart. Anytime, anywhere: our online courses are here for you to start making your good relationship great!

Our instructors and advisors have gone through extensive training in leadership, psychology of interpersonal relationships, group process, and communication. They hold various certifications from widely known and respected organizations such as: [Better Marriages](#), [Prepare-Enrich](#), and [Couple Communication](#).

What Couples Say

“What we’ve learned ranges from simple reminders to profound insights that we could explore together and benefit from for the long haul.” - J&H

“We would absolutely not be together today had we not participated in programs and followed the principles of Close Companions. They have encouraged us, inspired us, and educated us about what a relationship could be. We give them credit for helping us figure out how to not just stay together but to thrive as a couple. And now, thanks to the Online Relationship Academy, we can do it 24/7!” - M&M

“Better Marriages has fed the soul of our marriage! The Close Companions Online Relationship Academy has several courses that go right to the heart of our relationship and help us communicate in positive, constructive ways. We will be sharing this resource with all of our friends!” -K&N



One Shot at Love

by [Dr. Jackie Black](#)



Dr. Jackie Black

Marriage Educator and Board Certified Coach

Remember,
Only YOU can make it happen!



drjackieblack.com

What if you have one shot at creating the best relationship ever...

The fact of the matter is that everyone would be much better off if we actually believed that we only had one shot to build the relationship of our dreams.

Too many smart, articulate and successful adults around the world go into relationships without deliberate intention, and with the belief that if it doesn't work they can break up or get divorced.

That one concept is poison to the entire relationship-building process!

- Decide that divorce is NOT an option.
- Figure out who you are in the deepest recesses of your being.
- Stop acting from fear.
- Stop settling for anything in your relationship just being good enough!

Think of the relationship itself this way: When you and your partner join the many facets of your lives together, you create a third energy, the relationship. The relationship lives and breathes as its own entity; an entity that you are entrusted to guard and protect, nurture and care for.

Making and keeping agreements and com-commitments is one of the ways couples make that happen. It is vital that partners know in the deepest part of their being that they can count on the promises and assurances offered by their beloved.

In a long-term, primary, monogamous love relationship make agreements and commitments to each other AND to the relationship. Fanning the flames of romance and intimacy is another way couples keep their relationship strong. And that requires that each of you take responsibility for creating romance and intimacy in your relationship.

Whatever you believe is true, is! Be deliberate. Be intentional. Believe you can have what you want!

Rekindle Your Relationship with Mindfulness

by [Dr. Linda Miles](#)

Do you recall the beginning of your relationship, when you first fell in love? What is it that made those butterflies in your stomach fade away? What happened along the way that made you lose those moments of staring into each other's eyes and not getting enough? Try to remember those wonderful moments and describe your behavior. Recall your partner's behavior at that time. Is it still the same?

Too often in a long-term relationship partners stop the very behaviors that connected them with one another and not because they stop loving each other but because they begin to take the other one for granted. Sensual and gratifying behaviors are lost, such as looking deeply into one another's eyes, Mouth to mouth kisses, sexual innuendo, offering your partner focused attention, active listening, random compliments, gifts, etc.

What is it that you have stopped doing? What has your partner stopped doing? What behaviors would you like to rekindle in your relationship? How can Mindfulness help you rekindle your relationship? Mindfulness is a practice of awareness in the present moment. Dr. John Gottman, relationship expert and researcher, describes successful long-term unions as a "string of pearls" made up of mindful moments of connection and appreciation. The happiest and healthiest couples do not necessarily spend a lot of time in conversation but they have a myriad of ways of mindfully connecting with one another in the present moment.

Walton and Kathryn were a couple who maintained a mindful connection for 60 years despite financial hardship, two jobs, and four children. Their laughter was their prosperity during hard times. Their joy and pleasure in one another was the wealth in poverty. Their love was the antidote to sorrow. Their daughter, Jan, shared that she thought all parents went to sleep laughing and sharing affection at night because her bedroom shared a common wall with her parents'. Joy and laughter are forms of mindful connection to one another in the present moment.

When Walton was dying, he told a group of us who stopped by the story of how he and Kathryn had a hurried wedding so he could go off to the Second World War and that she was still his sweetheart after 60 years. She sat beside him and beamed. Walton and Kathryn are an inspirational couple who maintained a mindful connection over time. We have all seen such couples but what lessons can we apply to our relationships?

In order to have a relationship as successful as theirs, mindful training is a plus. Mindful training includes the practice of focusing on the breath to calm down and experience the present moment, and deliberately sending compassion to self and others.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to manifest affection towards one another. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Just mindfully thinking about your partner with feelings of loving-kindness can boost the pleasure chemical dopamine and [lower stress hormones](#) adrenalin and cortisol. You get a kind of pleasurable chemical shower.



Dr. Linda Miles

PSYCHOTHERAPIST
RELATIONSHIP
SPECIALIST
AUTHOR & SPEAKER



"If you change your story...you can change your brain."

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One of the most effective acts is mindfully kissing on the mouth. That is because lips are incredibly sensitive. "Of the 12 or 13 cranial nerves that affect cerebral functions, five are at work when we kiss". (Scientific American). In addition, kissing on the mouth allows for an exchange of saliva that can help boost the immune system of both partners. Human beings are wired for connection so practice mindfully bringing yourself into the present moment to enjoy all the sensations generated an intimate kiss.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to share affection daily. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Sex therapist, David Schnarch, recommends a type of mindful intimate connection called "eyes open" sex so couples maintain prescient awareness of one another during the sexual experience.

PRACTICES

Physical affection and sex offer a myriad of opportunities to practice mindfulness with your partner. As you kiss on the lips, notice how your body feels as you attend to the sensations of the present moment. Remember what behaviors you had when you first fell in love and mindfully repeat those behaviors. Mindfully look into your partner's eyes with compassion for his/her struggles.

Find ways to connect mindfully with your partner in the present moment through laughter, mutual memories, walks, and shared affection. This becomes a positive bank account of emotions so, when times are hard, you have these connections.

Initiate sexual contact and use all your senses to experience the moment. Look into your partner's eyes, play special music, savor the touch of skin, smell scented candles or massage oil. Always return to the sensations of the present moment.

It is possible to mindfully cultivate a compassionate awareness of your partner by following these steps: Sit quietly for five minutes at a time and pay attention to your breathing. Since mindfulness is a practice, it is better to do this for longer. However, short segments can also be helpful.

Feel the breath moving into your heart with kindness and care and repeat: "May I be free of suffering. May I be at peace". Allow yourself to be healed. Continue repeating "May I be healed. May I be free of suffering" with each breath.

Imagine loving kindness with each breath. Continue breathing as you focus on your loving-kindness and relating to yourself with tenderness while sending well-being into your mind and body. Repeat for a number of breaths: "May I find my greatest joy. May I heal into my true nature".

Now bring your mind to your partner and imagine that you can send them warmth and kindness. With each breath think, "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace.". Continue the breathing of connection and this wish for their happiness and wholeness, repeating: "May you be free from suffering. May you know your deepest joy, your greatest peace.". Continue and picture your partner's presence with a wish for their healing and deepest joy.

To rekindle your relationship, mindfully pay attention and treat your partner as you treated him/her in the beginning. Don't take him/her for granted and most important: enjoy moments spent together, living it in the present. This is what mindfulness is about!

True Intimacy: Know and be Known

By Greg and Priscilla Hunt

What is romance? We're not just talking about the stars-in-your-eyes romance that the media promotes. That's important in even the longest of relationships, but there's more. The ultimate romance is the romance that leads to true intimacy – knowing and being known at the core of who we are. All of us were created with a longing for this.

If you want to grow closer and know each other more, do this: determine to do whatever it takes to improve your relationship with your partner. Research shows that if couples will channel their energy and creativity towards strengthening their relationship, our families will be healthier, our children will be happier, and we as individuals will increase our emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

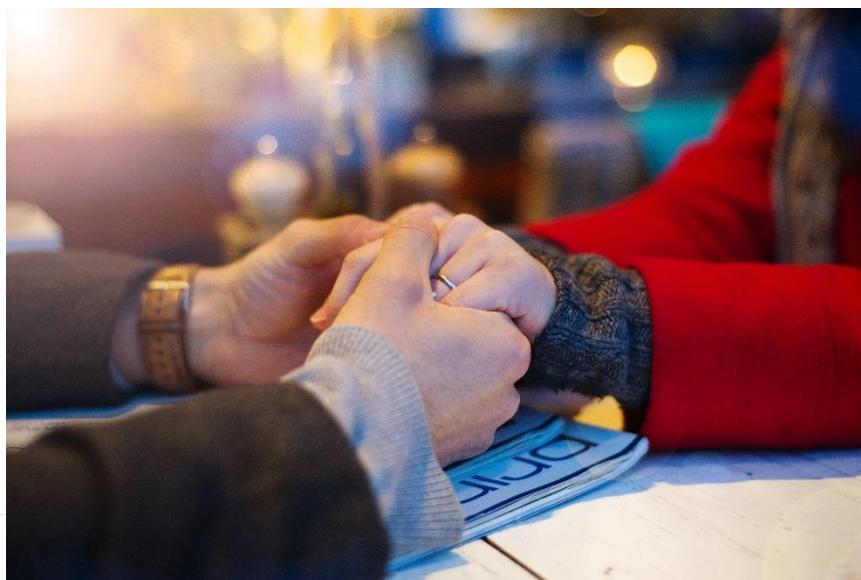
Actions

- Adopt a pro-active, growth-focused attitude about your relationship.
- Spend more time together as a couple.
- Schedule regular date nights and getaways with your partner. Write it on the calendar and protect it!
- Set aside time each day to talk together about the important things of your day and your life. Go deeper than “small talk” and “shop talk”.
- Work on your problems and conflicts – don't let them go unresolved or sweep them under the rug.
- Get help if you need it. Seek out a counselor, therapist or minister.
- Attend a relationship class, join a couple growth group or read a book together about relationships. Yes, relationships take work – but it's work that pays off!

Talk About It

With your partner, take turns sharing your answers to these questions. Together, create an action plan with realistic goals for the next 3-6 months.

1. What am I personally willing to do to better our relationship? (what specific actions)
2. Where might we find time to have daily sharing time (10-15 minutes)
3. When might we schedule a date night or getaway (write it on the calendar)
4. Are there any unresolved conflicts we need to talk about (choosing a time in advance to talk about it can help set the stage for a calm, non-emotional conversation)



I'm Thankful. . .

by Priscilla Hunt

Faculty Member of the [Online Relationship Academy](#)

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

Gratitude can play a crucial role in managing our mental health and strengthening our relationships. Don't let stress and anxiety steal the joy from your day-to-day life. Instead, count your blessings.

In the midst of this stressful time, I'm grateful for:

life

my health

my husband

my family.

But, who *isn't* grateful for those things? I need to dig a little deeper. . .

I'm grateful for food. We're avoiding the grocery store these days, so I've decided to embark on the adventure of using what we have in the freezer and fixing meals without all the "proper" ingredients. It'll be nice to inventory what food we actually have on-hand and to really *create* meals.

My mother kept six hungry bellies fed on a shoestring budget. I never saw her use a recipe - she'd grab something from the freezer and see what she could put with it to make a meal. Canned peaches with grated cheddar and a dollop of mayo? Yes, please! Canned asparagus with a dollop of mayo? Bring it! She was ingenious and creative. I have some of her DNA - and, of course, a jar of mayonnaise.

I'm grateful for having grown up on a ranch in Texas. I learned to be adventuresome and self-sufficient. I didn't need extracurricular activities or play dates - I had horses and sheep and cows and a vivid imagination. I learned to love the out-of-doors. Camping, hiking, pulling weeds - just get me outside where I can fill my lungs with fresh air and feel the warmth of the sun on my face.

I'm grateful for couples who care about their relationships. Who treat each other with respect. Who don't throw each other under the bus. Who don't take themselves too seriously. I love hanging out with those couples. It encourages and inspires me.

And, of course, I'm grateful for Greg. Growing up in an alcoholic, abusive home, I've had my baggage to work through. Greg has been there with me and for me every step of the way, encouraging me, supporting me, accepting me, and loving me. Who knows who or what I would have become without his steady, constant love.

What are some things you're grateful for today?

How about sharing them with your-someone-special?

20 Ideas for Saying “I Love You”

from www.signupgenius.com

1. Make a list of the 10 things you love most about your significant other and text it to him — one item at a time throughout the day — countdown style.
 2. Buy your wife some bubble bath and draw a bath for her just as she is getting ready to cook dinner. Then, take over the dinner prep while she soaks.
 3. Have his car detailed, and leave him a love note on the dashboard.
 4. Download the song that you danced to at your wedding, and dance to it together.
 5. Have the florist replicate your wife’s wedding bouquet, and deliver it to her.
 6. Make her a coupon book of pampering favors, such as back rubs or foot rubs.
 7. Rent her favorite rom-com, and watch it together while eating chocolates and drinking her favorite wine.
 8. Rent his favorite action movie, and watch it while enjoying a manly combo of his favorite meat appetizers and beer.
 9. Watch the movie that you saw together on your first movie date.
 10. Hide love notes in surprise places, such as in his briefcase, his car or next to his shoes.
 11. Have a copy of your wedding vows framed.
 12. Plan a surprise date — have your partner set aside time, but don’t tell her where you are going for dinner or entertainment.
 13. Sign both of you up for a class that your partner would enjoy, such as a cooking or yoga class.
 14. Go through his desk calendar and insert little love notes that he will appreciate finding all year long.
 15. Surprise your partner by doing a chore that is on her to-do list.
 16. Skip your chores to go for a walk together — and hold hands.
 17. Light a fire, open a bottle of wine and look through your wedding photo album together. If you have a wedding video – even better. Turn the lights low, light some candles and reminisce.
 18. Write down popular book and movie quotes that are about love and leave them scattered about the house for your partner to find.
 19. Send your wife a dozen roses, and include a note with a dozen reasons why you love her.
 20. Surprise your partner with something from his “bucket list” such as a skydiving lesson.
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Turn Towards Instead of Away

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Ellie Lisitsa

The strongest relationships (and homes) are built from the ground up. According to Dr. Gottman's 40+ years of research, one of the greatest predictors of your relationship's success is your ability to turn towards each other, constantly developing your bond by making an effort every day to reach out to your partner and accept their bids for emotional connection.

We have found that the majority of fights in relationships are the result of turning away from and against these bids. Turning away and against are related to both suppressed negativity (sadness, whining, stonewalling) and being in the attack-defend mode (anger, criticism, contempt, defensiveness, belligerence).

Playful bids and enthusiastic efforts to turn towards each other result in heightened levels of positivity during conflict discussions. They also help you to build up your emotional bank account, maintain a strong and healthy bond, and bring the fire back into your romance.

When Dr. Gottman asked couples what they thought made their relationships feel more romantic, he heard the following examples: candle-lit dinners, soft music, lovely drives in the country, picnics, and moonlit walks. According to his research on relationships, none of these things alone will make your love life better if you are not first connected emotionally.

Here we will provide some easy but very effective ways in which you can make a deep and lasting emotional connection with your loved one and show them your commitment and attention throughout the day:

- You have just woken up and your partner is lying next to you. Roll over, put your arm around them, and tell them how thankful you are that you get to wake up next to them every day.
- You are reading the paper over breakfast and your partner makes a passing comment about a meeting they have at work that day. Follow up on what they said (put down that paper!) and give them your attention for a minute.
- You are walking together and you see that your partner looks cold. Stop into the nearest coffee shop and get them a warm beverage!
- Your partner is leaving to go somewhere. Tell them to come see you before they go. When they come to see you, give them a six-second kiss.
- You see that your partner looks stressed. Let them know you've noticed, and ask them if they'd like to talk about what they are feeling.
- Your partner sends you a text message about something, anything. Send them one back that lets them know how irresistible they are to you.

- Compliment your partner about something they did. Compliment your partner about their appearance.
- Thank them for something they've recently done that you appreciate.
- Your partner is back from their errand and is doing some housework. Without saying a word, join in and start helping them.
- Your partner tells you that they are getting hungry. You tell them that you are too, and that you are going to take them out for dinner.
- Your partner and you are talking after dinner, and they say how much they miss going out and dancing like you used to back in the day. Agree and recommend that you go out right now and dance.
- Your partner is looking tired, but you are still having fun. You know that they have to be up early tomorrow to prepare for a meeting. Recommend that you go home so that they can get some rest.
- You are in the bedroom and things are getting hot. Light some candles, and tell them that you want to re-discover their body for an hour.



Want to Keep Love Alive? Here's How!

by [Charlie and Linda Bloom](#)

There is an idea going around that you may have heard, that long-term relationships eventually and inevitably become flat and boring. Unfortunately, all too many people believe this myth and act accordingly. That is, they expect this to happen and when they experience moments in which feelings of attraction, desire, or sexual excitement are not powerfully stimulating, they assume that the flame has gone out and that the future is bleak and uninspiring.



Possessed by this expectation, it's not surprising that many couples' relationships can begin an inexorable downward trajectory that all too often may end in separation or worse.

While it is not possible to prevent those moments from ever occurring, it *is* possible to strengthen the substance of a relationship in a way that minimizes their impact and diminishes the frequency of those occurrences. Not just a little bit, but to a very significant degree.

"What's the catch?", you might ask. There is none, that is, unless you call infusing your life with more fun and pleasure a catch. And yes, that is what it takes to make sure that you keep your relationship fresh, passionate, and exciting, whether you're twenty or ninety.

Lest you get into the "I'd-love-to-but-there's-not-enough-time" syndrome, let me remind you that it's never a matter of having *enough* time; it's always a matter of how you choose to prioritize your time. Many of us assign a higher priority to activities and commitments other than our relationships, not necessarily because we don't value our relationships, but often because we take them for granted and create the false belief that we can afford to neglect our connection or put it on cruise control. After all, we think, since we're committed, we're solid and we don't need to continue to put the time, attention, and energy into things that we did in the early days when our relationship wasn't so secure. Wrong. It's a big mistake to take your partnership for granted and assume that it doesn't require the same kind of care and attention that it did way back when. Worse, it can be a set up for disaster if this neglect continues for too long.

After a few years of married life, the inclination to take for granted what we used to appreciate can become strong, making it easy for a couple to slip into being roommates, business partners, and if they are raising children, co-parents. These are all important roles we find ourselves in each day, but if the relationship becomes defined by these roles, the important component of being lovers can be squeezed out.

In most relationships there is one partner who places a higher value than the other on romance. Contrary to popular opinion, it's not always the woman. But the person who is the stand for keeping romance alive will be more likely to notice when it is fading. Consequently, this person has more power to introduce corrections to bring more closeness and playfulness into the relationship. This is not to imply that he or she has the sole responsibility for keeping an eye on things, but rather because of this awareness, they are more capable of influencing the depth of connection in the relationship.

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There are myriad ways to bring more of this spirit into a relationship. One way is to go out on a date. Dates aren't just for young lovers; they work magic for those of us who have been together for a while because going away from home provides a change of scenery, and enlivens things for both partners.

Staying home for a date can be fun too. You can have a romantic dinner by candlelight. Consider making date night a regular feature of your relationship. Dates don't have to be limited to a few hours together on an occasional evening; they can be an entire day, a weekend, or even longer, depending on the agreement you and your partner make with each other. And honeymoons (without the kids of course) aren't just for the newly married. Taking one every year is not too much. We know lots of people (including ourselves) who have made a tradition of this practice.

In honor of Valentine's Day, here are a few more ideas you might want to consider. Taking time to honor the intimacy component of your partnership can become habit-forming. Try some of these and add your own creative touches to the process of keeping romance alive.

1. Designate what we refer to as "Sacred time" and create a tech-free zone which will assure you that there will be NO interruptions. Then, enjoy.
2. Some delightful ways of spending an evening together don't cost anything. Going into the tub with each other, with candlelight of course, followed by more candlelight in the bedroom, is always a sure way to enhance the spirit of romance.
3. Take turns being in service to each other. You can bathe each other and wash each other's hair. You could shave his face and he could shave your legs (or vice versa –just kidding!)
4. Agree beforehand to feed each other every forkful of an entire meal. We know of a number of couples who have done this in restaurants, often to the surprise of other diners. Sit across the corner of the table so you can be close to each other. Feeding each other slows down the rate at which you eat. This is also a good way to lose weight, since generally, the slower we eat, the less we eat.
5. Spend time being connected through your eyes only, without the need to exchange words. While this may seem a bit awkward at first, after a few minutes you'll begin to settle in to the experience and you may begin to experience some surprisingly delightful feelings.
6. After dinner you can listen to music together, and might even want to dance. If you'd prefer privacy, try dancing with your partner in your own living room or bedroom. Another big advantage of dancing in your own home is that you can take your clothes off. You'll know for sure that you are not roommates or business partners when you're dancing nude!
7. Massage is another great way to keep romance alive. You don't need a massage table or fancy scented massage oils. Just take the cooking oil down from the kitchen shelf and lay down a towel on the bed or floor. And you don't have to be a professionally-trained masseuse or masseur to bring a loving touch.

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8. Reading love poems to each other brings sweetness. If you enjoy the exotic, consider poetry from Rumi, Hafiz, or Kabir.

9. Love notes stuck in books, under plates and pillows and in the underwear drawer are sure to draw smiles of appreciation.

10. Last, but not least, is the way lovers talk romantic talk. It needs to be sincere, intimate, and full of feeling from the heart.

These emotional interchanges are the main meal. Sex is the desert, and it's non-fattening. Taking time out of our busy lives to make sure that the intimate aspects of our relationship is thriving works wonders for the partnership and our lives as a whole. Trying something new can promote more thrills and excitement than anxiety if we are mindful about the ways in which we approach change. We can rest assured that the lovers' aspect of our relationship is thriving when we're enjoying the art of bringing pleasure to each other. And we receive the added benefit of all those health-enhancing hormones running through our body that promote happiness and well-being. Mmmmmmm good!

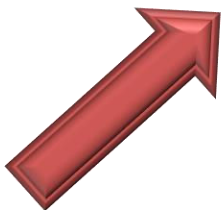




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