

Strategy: *Make time to laugh and have fun together.*

“Laughter is the best medicine.” There is a lot of truth in that old saying and some of it applies to our relationships.

First of all, laughter is good for all of us regardless of our relationship status. Research has linked laughter, and even the anticipation of laughter, to an increase in people’s production of endorphins, otherwise known as the body’s “feel good” chemical. Other research has linked laughter and humour to health benefits like pain reduction and reduced stress levels.

Laughter researcher Dr. Robert Provine says the biggest benefit of laughter is probably the way it binds people together (Psychology Today). Laughter has been shown to be beneficial for all kinds of social relationships, but research suggests that laughter is uniquely good for couple relationships. In one study of couples who had been married for at least 45 years, a sense of humour was one of the top three stated reasons for the success of the relationship (Lauer, 1990).

Another study showed that even reminiscing about laughing together boosted relationship satisfaction in couples (Bazzini, 2007).

This shouldn’t come as a surprise. Laughter makes us feel good, and we all get along better with people when we feel good. Laughter can also help relax us, defuse conflict and reduce stress. Laughter also creates, and in some cases, restores, a positive atmosphere. All of these things can be good for a couple relationship.

The Power of Humour

Provine says laughter plays a big role in mating. He has found that women laugh a little more often than men, and men tell more jokes than women. One of his findings indicates that men like women who laugh in their presence and that the laughter of a woman is one important indicator of the health of a male/female relationship.

Not all kinds of fun involve laughing, yet we know intuitively that having fun together and building shared memories of good times is beneficial to a relationship. How can you include more fun and laughter in your intimate relationship? Here are some suggestions:

Make Time for Fun

It might seem a bit strange to “structure” fun into your life, but many people’s lives are highly scheduled these days due to work, commuting, business travel, parenting, elder care, errands, housework and other responsibilities. When a spare moment comes, it’s sometimes easier to just “plop” down in front of the television, rather than get out and enjoy activities together. Try setting aside a regular time each week, or every second week, for you and your partner to do something together that you really enjoy.

Brainstorm

Planning “fun” may not sound like much fun either. However, if you and your partner are out of the habit, try making a list of fun things you both would like to

do together. If you already know what you like to do together, great! Schedule these activities into your daily lives more often.

Surprise Your Partner

Once in a while, try surprising your partner by taking her/him out to do something enjoyable. Pick a time when he or she is not likely to be busy or have something scheduled. It doesn't have to be a major event – even brunch, breakfast, or cappuccino and dessert can be nice.

Be Open to New Activities

Be prepared to try some things your partner enjoys more than you do. You may both need to be flexible and try different things to find more things you both like doing together.

Ignore Your Inner Critic

There are always things we can find to do that seem more important than enjoying ourselves. And, for sure, shopping, cleaning, fixing and cooking all need to get done. But, “neglect” your chores every now and then and sneak away to have some fun with your partner. Think of it as an investment in your relationship.

Try to See the Humour (Even in Tough Times)

One of the benefits of laughter is that it can relieve stress. Obviously, it's not always appropriate to laugh when things go wrong. Yet, in many cases, finding the humour in our mishaps (perhaps after a little time has passed) can help normalize some of the things that go wrong for us and prevent us from brooding about them.

Laugh *with* Each other, Not *at* Each other

In spite of all the benefits of laughter, the one kind of laughter universally disliked in all cultures, is being laughed *at*. So, make sure you and your partner are really sharing the humour.

When you have fun together, you're not only enjoying yourselves in the moment, you're also creating a sort of “bank account” of shared positive memories. These memories can help keep your relationship satisfying, exciting and strong.

References:

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