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By Pam Cloud

Make Every Day Of The Year Valentine's Day

Tomorrow, couples across America will exchange heart-shaped boxes of chocolate, stuffed animals, flowers, cards and other gifts to demonstrate their love for one another.

Valentine's Day might be the only day of the year some couples take the time to focus on the other partner, but relationship experts suggest that romancing a partner and making every single day of the year Valentine's Day might help change a rocky relationship for the better or make a good one even greater.

"The truth is, romance is a very small part of what makes a marriage or long-term relationship successful," Dr. Howard Rankin, creator of the Science of You website (www.scienceofyou.com), said in a news release. "It's getting the other 98 percent right that makes a couple last in the long haul. So, really, it's too bad we don't have any days devoted to issues like communication, fighting fairly and forgiving."

If you think couples don't need to spend more time together, think again. A recent Sittercity poll of parents revealed that 43 percent haven't had a date night in more than three months, and almost one in five haven't gone out since having children.

Jonathan D. Sherman, a licensed marriage and family therapist, said spreading Valentine's Day throughout the entire year is not only practical, but makes good sense.

"Valentine's all year does not need to be flowers and dining out every day. It is about splurging with our attention and with our commitments for one another," Sherman said in an online article on Bardos Relationship Counseling's website. "Practical romance is all about showering one's spouse with simple, fun, deep, profound, silly and meaningful words and deeds on a regular and consistent basis and not just once a year.

Sherman suggests that couples jumpstart into the Valentine's all year mindset by making a list of 52 things each can do for their spouse this year to express love and commitment to him or her.

In her book, "Emotional Freedom," Dr. Judith Orloff identifies four emotional types that can explain how people relate to others.

"To pin down your style of relating, it's helpful to know your emotional type - and that of your love partner," Orloff said. "Your emotional type is the filter through which you both see the world - the default setting of your personality to which you each revert, especially under stress."

Orloff identifies the four emotional types as the Intellectual, the Empath, the Rock and the Gusher. She describes the Intellectual as bright, articulate and often taking refuge in the mind as the first line of coping. The Empath is highly sensitive, naturally giving and a good listener. She describes the Rock as emotionally strong for self and others, nonjudgmental and able to stay cool in a crisis. The Gusher is spontaneous, direct, authentic and knows his or her emotions and shares them often.

Rankin encourages couples to celebrate Valentine's Day as a "New Year's Day" of the marriage or partnership, with very specific things that can be done during the upcoming year to change a relationship for the better.

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"It's fine to enlist your partner in this effort; but if he or she won't cooperate, you try changing and see what happens," Rankin said. "Very often you'll find that your partner quickly and enthusiastically reciprocates, and the entire dynamics of your relationship changes."

Rankin offers 10 steps that can transform a good (or so-so or maybe even deeply troubled) relationship into a great relationship.

1. Ask yourself: Would I rather be right ... or would I rather be happy? Rankin says that in successful relationships, both partners accept that we all have our different ways of doing things.

"No one wants to be micromanaged, especially in her own home," Rankin explains. "If you want to be right and prove your point on everything, your relationship is likely to fail ... Think about the big picture. Does it really matter how chores are done or is this just about control?"

2. Master the fine art of communication. Rankin says communication is at the root of the problems faced by almost every couple he's ever seen. The biggest mistake couples make, according to Rankin, is not realizing the need to create an environment that allows their partner to talk freely about their thoughts and feelings.

3. Learn to fight fair. "Try to abandon the usual strategy of trying to win at all costs," Rankin said. "Instead, work toward a productive resolution that you can both accept."

4. Commit, already. (And no, it has nothing to do with a wedding ring.) Commitment is the glue that keeps a relationship together, Rankin said.

"A relationship without commitment isn't a relationship - it's a loose arrangement," Rankin explains. "Commitment really means that you consider the other person in all matters - you consider how any action you might take affects your partner and the relationship."

5. Be trustworthy. And it's not just about fidelity. It's about trusting that your partner will respect you, be honest with you and not hurt you.

"Do not break trust with your partner," Rankin said. "Lack of trust is corrosive. It eats away at the very fabric of a relationship and leads to disillusion and dissolution."

6. Learn how to share unconditionally. "We all want unconditional love, and yet we find it very difficult to give unconditionally ourselves," Rankin said. "And yet, successful relationships do require sacrifice. Try giving your partner an unconditional surprise at least once a week. Do it without expecting anything in return."

7. Nurture your partner's dreams and goals. In a nutshell, nurturing your partner means accepting his independence and doing whatever you can to encourage it.

8. Realize that real romance isn't about the roses. "It's all too easy in the mayhem of everyday life not to make time for romance," Rankin said. "Realize that romance can happen at any time, anywhere if you make it happen. It doesn't have to be Valentine's Day. It's about taking the time, creating or taking advantage of that moment of isolation where there is just the two of you and sharing the closeness that makes your relationship special."

9. Embrace the F-word - forgiveness. In the course of a relationship, conflicts and major disagreements will occur. To stave off resentment, a partner needs to accept two facts that many couples struggle with, according to Rankin: You cannot control another person unless they let you; and sometimes you have to give up or modify your dreams. Unless a person comes to terms with these facts, they will have a rough time engaging in a successful relationship.

10. Don't make an "ass" out of "u" and "me." Don't assume that you understand your partner. "Asking, instead of assuming, will result in a much more peaceful environment," Rankin said. "And trying to find out what your partner is really thinking and feeling and respecting it is a true act of love."

Rankin said a good relationship shouldn't take a ton of hard work, but it does take a certain amount of reflection, self-control, compromise and vigilance.

"The time you put into creating and maintaining a healthy relationship is worth the effort," Rankin explained. "Do it, and by the time Valentine's Day 2012 rolls around, your candlelit dinner might not feel quite so fake and forced or at least so novel.

"It will feel like a fun, romantic interlude in a relationship that works 365 days of the year," he added.