

If The Obama's Can Do It, You Can Too
3 Easy Steps to Establish Date Night
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

If the Obama's can do it, you can do it. Date night is a common practice used by couples all over the world to make sure that they treat their marriage as the priority that they claim it is. "Date night" is one of those tools that helps keep marriages strong. Most couples are under a great deal of stress from demands all about them. Couples who are in trouble with their marriages tend to work against each other in these conditions. Couples who stay connected and use the tools to keep their relationship strong are better able to weather the stress.

Different couples schedule date night at different intervals. Regardless of whether you have weekly, biweekly, or monthly "date nights", the trick to following through is to select the best day and time for the date and make it a "sacred time" where nothing gets takes precedence before it.

When you commit to scheduling it in for the next X number of weeks or months, you are beginning to treat it as the "sacred time" that it is. Nothing gets scheduled over the top of it. Nothing takes precedence. It does not get postponed. It is solidly planned and committed to. Period. If you need baby sitters for date night, get them scheduled as much in advance as you can. Get two or three backup sitters for "on-call". With enough planning, you can consistently have "Date Night". Once you have the time scheduled you have to decide what to do on your dates. And that may not be as easy as you would think. To set up your date schedule, follow these steps:

1. Consult your schedules and pick out the best time for both of you, then write it in your schedule book for "X" number of weeks or months in advance.
2. Generate three lists, especially if money is an issue.
 - a. List one - Each partner contributes things that s/he would like to do on a date that costs money. Regardless of whether you think the other one would want to engage in that activity or go on that particular date, write it down. Each person should contribute at least ten items or ten date scenarios (i.e., dinner and a movie) to this list.
 - b. Then generate a second list of ten that has no cost or minimal cost attached to it. (i.e., going to free outdoor concert, going fishing, charcoaling steaks and dancing to Big Band Jazz on Saturday night on your backyard deck, etc.) Each person should add their desired date activities regardless of whether you think the other would want to do that activity.
 - c. Generate a third list of ten date activities that you know you agree upon, cost not taken in account.

- d. Combine the three lists, eliminating two items from the cost date and two from the no-cost date. The activities left are your beginning date night activities. Keep the list handy.
3. Take turns choosing from the list what your date night activity will be. Or cut the list activity list up so that items show up on separate pieces of paper and put them in a jar to be randomly selected. The purpose of each person contributing what they would like to do is to help couples expand their horizons and to practice a little give and take.

Distressed couples often complain that when they actually do decide to go out and do something, it is only one person who does the deciding or who has the veto power over the choice of activity. This, while it might get them out of the house, is not doing all it can to communicate love and create an loving, partnership atmosphere.

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