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A MOMFERENCE GUIDE

Love & Relationships



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Welcome to the Momference Guide To Making the Most of Valentines Day!

- Love your Heart: Dedication of the Momference Guide to The American Heart Association's campaign to Go Red for Women
- Making the Most of Valentines Day by Brenda Bonin
- Expressing Love to the Most Important Person in your Life by Barbara Desmarais
- The Divorce and Dating Playbook by Laura Campbell
- Children Who Feel Loved Are More Loving by Pam Leo
- 10 Ways to Say *I Love You* to Your Partner without Using Words by Tara Paterson
- Make Your Reservations Now for A Day of Love by Jacqueline Cornaby
- My Funny Valentine by Karen Gardner
- Hooking Up: Whatever Happened to Crushes? by Logan Levkoff
- The Cheerios Path to Love by Carol Metzker
- Solo (or so low) on Valentines Day by Linda Ward
- How to Cherish Valentines Day! by Grace E. Mauzy
- The Secrets of Positive Co-Parenting by Rob Stringer
- The Bedroom of Choice by Bedroom Matters
- Valentine's Day Romance? Save It for March by Judy Gruen

Upcoming Momference Events:

In the next few months, the Momference Team will be hard at work to bring you our next series of Momference events. So far, the Momference schedule of topics is as follows:

- Divorce
- Special Needs Children
- Domestic Violence
- Child Safety
- Parenting Teens
- Mompreneurs

Register for the upcoming event of your choices via the Momference blog at www.momference.wordpress.com and find informational articles, podcasts, and experts specializing in fields important to moms!

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“Love Your Heart” During February, American Heart Month, Says American Heart Association

Connecticut and the rest of the country will **Go Red For Women this February**, American Heart Month. While Americans commemorate matters of the heart in a variety of ways during February, for the American Heart Association February is a time to intensify awareness, knowledge, and prevention of cardiovascular disease – the country’s leading killer. Urging women to “Love Your Heart,” the American Heart Association’s national theme for 2008 American Heart Month is “Go Red For Women,” a national social movement to raise awareness that heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women and to have women take action to improve their heart health. Friday, February 1 will also mark the fifth annual National Wear Red Day for Women, a massive national public awareness day to focus on the **No. 1 killer and No. 1 health threat facing women today – cardiovascular disease.**

Sponsored nationally by Macy’s and Merck, the American Heart Association Go Red For Women movement captures the energy, passion and intelligence of women to work collectively to wipe out heart disease. In five years, Go Red For Women has grown from a grassroots campaign to a vibrant national movement. Using the simple moniker “Love Your Heart,” Go Red For Women aims to mobilize women, men, celebrities, healthcare providers, politicians, and others to embrace and elevate the cause of women and cardiovascular disease. For more information, resources and hope, call the American Heart Association Go Red For Women hotline at 1-888-MY-HEART (1-888-694-3278) or visit www.GoRedForWomen.org.

By loving your heart, women can save it and live longer, stronger lives. The “Love Your Heart” gesture is about a woman taking a moment for herself and her life. By paying more attention to her heart, says the American Heart Association, a woman can appreciate her health, her life and her loved ones.

More than 460,000 women die annually from cardiovascular diseases, says the American Heart Association, and a woman is ten times as likely to die from heart disease as from breast cancer.

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For more information about local activities, the American Heart Association Go Red For Women movement, February 1 National Wear Red Day for Women.

About the American Heart Association

Founded in 1924, the American Heart Association today is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to building healthier lives, free of heart disease and stroke. These diseases, America's No. 1 and No. 3 killers, and all other cardiovascular diseases claim nearly 870,000 lives a year. In fiscal year 2006–07, the association invested more than \$554 million in research, professional and public education, advocacy and community service programs to help all Americans live longer, healthier lives. The American Heart Association serves Connecticut's eight counties and population of more than 3.5 million people. The American Heart Association is a proud member of Community Health Charities of New England. To learn more, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit americanheart.org.



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Making the Most of Valentines Day

The two most important things for us all to remember about Valentine's Day are to avoid having high expectations and to remember that it's the thought that counts. Too much pressure to live up to ideals can sour the sweetness of this holiday.

I remember the first Valentine's Day that I gave my children special presents. The best part was that they had no expectation of these little treats. Unlike Halloween and Christmas, they didn't notice any of the hype leading up to the day. The delight was in seeing their pure surprise, completely lacking in any disappointment of missing the mark of a highly anticipated gift-getting occasion. This was about 7 years ago, but even today my 11 year old son and 9 year old daughter cherish those sweet stuffed animals with long arms that wrap around them, giving a hug. At this point, they have caught on, and probably do have some expectations. But so far, they haven't given me a wish list in advance.

This Valentine's Day surprise has become a tradition in our home, and now the best part is that I get to take complete credit. No false pretense or wondering about the illusive third party gift givers (i.e., Santa or Easter Bunny). No, this one comes from Mom. I give both of my kids a little something special as well as my husband. They are all my sweethearts.

Another tradition we have is to celebrate at home as a family on Valentine's Day. We have a special dinner that we all fix together, light candles, use the better dishes, and have a cozy family evening. My husband and I plan a Valentine's date-night either before or after the big day. Our experience has been that Valentine's Day dinners out are often disappointing. Your favorite restaurant tends to have a "special" menu, which really means "double the price" and might not even include your favorite entrée. It tends to be very crowded, and service can suffer. So, we plan our date around Valentine's Day not on it.

This is the time of year that many traditional romantic items suddenly cost a lot more. Why pay three times more for a dozen roses on Valentine's Day when you could have fresh flowers once a month all year long the same amount of money? With the price of some greeting cards, why not

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make your own? For the price of one “special” dinner out, you could take your whole family to dinner and a movie. We don’t have to opt in to the commercial hype of this holiday.

When I was a kid Valentine’s Day was sometimes full of disappointment. In grade school there was the annual valentine box decorating contest. Some of my classmates would arrive with the most elaborate boxes that clearly had more than a little help from an adult or two. My modest creations paled in comparison. Then there was the anxiety around how many valentines would I get and who would or would not put a valentine in my box. I remember some of the more shy or less popular kids getting very few valentines and feeling very sad. It was not my favorite holiday.

Today, our school has gone to a more equitable approach that seems to be a lot more fun for everyone. All the kids in the grade make their valentine receptacle with the same modest materials, such as a brown paper bag that they can decorate as they choose. They do this at school, so all of the first-grade bags look like first-graders made them. Students are required to have a valentine for everyone in the class, or they may choose not to give any valentines at all. If the school didn’t have this policy, it would still be our family policy. If my son or daughter wants to give something special to a particular friend, they do that outside of the school setting. Popularity contests and hurt feelings have no place in holiday celebrations. It is the thought that counts, so above all else, let’s be thoughtful.

About Brenda Bonin: Brenda Bonin, ACPI parent coach, certified by the Academy for Coaching Parents International (www.acpi.biz), is an advocate and resource for working mothers. Visit her at www.workingmothermatters.com for success strategies to manage it all when you have a family and a career.



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Expressing Love to the Most Important Person in your Life

Valentine's Day is one day out of the year when we make a point of acknowledging those people we love.

There are many different ways of expressing love. Using the words "I love you" is only one way but the words often has little meaning if our actions don't match our words. You may have heard the words yourself but the person saying them doesn't display love in their actions. There are others who have neither heard the words "I love you" nor had people in their lives express genuine love towards them. They have never truly felt loved by anyone.

What does it mean to truly love someone? It means accepting them for who they are, supporting their interests, forgiving them for their wrongs, acknowledging their accomplishments, being there for them in good times and bad, accepting their faults and appreciating their strengths.

When it comes to love, the most important person to love is yourself. If you can't love yourself, it's very hard to show love towards others. Loving yourself is defined in much the same way as loving someone else. That is accepting yourself for who you are, acknowledging your strengths, forgiving yourself for your mistakes, doing things that nurture your soul and celebrating your successes.

When it comes to loving yourself, how are you doing? Are you consistently putting the needs of others ahead of your own? Do you feel guilty for taking time out with friends or doing something just for the fun of it? Do you acknowledge the eventual result of putting yourself last? When it comes to self-love, what do you want to role model to your children? We know that children learn what they live. They can't learn to love themselves if it hasn't been role modeled.

Those of us who are parents were likely raised to believe that once we have children, they come first. Yes, children need to know they're a priority in our lives. A child who is completely dependent on us, has to come first. But what happens if we always put our children's needs ahead of our own? They often get a watered down version of who we really are.

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Part of loving our children is giving them our best. They deserve to have a parent who is happy, patient, tolerant, fun-loving, resourceful and emotionally and physically healthy. We can only become the best of who we are if we show love and respect towards ourselves. I've had so many parents (mostly mothers) tell me when they take a day for themselves to be with friends or do something they love they reunite with their family feeling renewed and refreshed. Things that may have irritated them the day before became insignificant. Parents who don't carry around resentment, are usually more fun to be around. They're better able to appreciate their children's strengths.

This Valentine's Day express love to your children's mother. Give her something she loves or write a poem to her. Write a loving affirmation for all the wonderful things she's done this year for other people. Buy her a bouquet of her favorite flowers or a bottle of her favorite wine. Go to a bakery and pick out her favorite chocolate desert. She deserves it! I'm talking about YOU.

About the Barbara Desmarais: Barbara Desmarais is a parenting and life coaching. She has worked with parents for close to 20 years. Visit her website at www.theparentingcoach.com or email her at barb@theparentingcoach.com



The Divorce and Dating Playbook

So, what am I doing here? This is what went through my mind on my first post-divorce date. And as I went on a few more, I began to wonder how many times I would have to answer the question “So, what’s your story?” Story? What story? I didn’t know that I had a story...as a matter of fact. I didn’t even know what my own story was!

- Online dating and creating a “profile”?
- Match.com
- Sex with someone other than my ex-husband
- Laser hair removal or shaving...and how much?
- Driving myself home at the end of a night out

These had become some of the things that now went through my mind as I entered dating as a “divorced” woman!

There was no one to consult...my friends did not have to date, they had husbands. I would have to come up with a playbook of my own. A dating playbook...with rules and plays and strategies. It would take time to develop and many, many experiences...both funny and pathetic.

Why couldn’t we just bypass the “what’s your story” question and pretend that we already knew each other? I just didn’t feel like summing up the past 15 years of my life in a short answer to one “simple” question.

So, here are the top 10 plays in my Divorce and Dating Playbook. Feel free to add, modify and define your own playbook as you move into this new and what will be a wonderful time in your life.



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1. Be what you want to attract

Before you are ready to date, take the time you need to identify everything that you want in a new relationship. Now, the hard part, ask the question “Am I all of the things that I want in a new partner and relationship?” If the answer is no, then that is where you need to begin. It is absolutely true that you WILL attract that which you put out there. So, be honest and look inward before you start searching out there!

2. Online dating IS part of the dating mix

No, there was no such thing as online dating when you got married...but, there is now! As much as we don't want to admit it...given our time, energy and commitments as divorced women...we don't have a lot of time to devote to dating. As well, since our lives revolve around work, the supermarket and our children's school and social calendars...we may never have the chance to meet a new guy. So, get on the computer and create an online profile that reflects what you want to attract and selectively choose men who meet your criteria. There is a big and beautiful world of people out there!

3. Sex

The dreaded “S” word. Who said dreaded? Sex is great and it's great rediscovering it the second time around! This is the time for you to get to know yourself sexually. If it is not a comfortable subject for you, make this a time to take it up as a “hobby”. Read about it, work with someone who can help you define your own sense of sensuality and become comfortable with your own body and sexual exploration. Make it fun, playful and a vital part of who are becoming. Then, take control. You decide if and when you want to have sex with a new partner or not. You create the rules and boundaries. It's your life and your body...enjoy!

4. Laser Hair Removal

Not much more to say here. Laser hair beats shaving...hands down!



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5. No Divorce Drunk Driving

No one ever told me that after you get divorced you have to drive YOURSELF home at the end of a night out! I always had a husband to drive me home after a glass or two of wine. Now, there I was, a bit “tipsy” and no driver! Where was the “D” Cab when I needed it? Wasn’t there some kind of divorced late night carpool that I could be a part of? So, here is all I have to say, “BE CAREFUL, DON’T DRIVE DRUNK”! You, your children and your future are far too important to make a mistake like driving drunk.

6. Dating Networking

You are now your own new business and you are the only employee. So, you need to develop a sales team! A team that will highlight your amazing qualities, features and benefits! A team that has your sales goals in mind...and by the way, you only need one great sale. Therefore, you need to network. You need to let your friends, family, colleagues, and anyone else that you meet know that you are ready to date and open to meeting new people. Go to social and professional networking events and share your new venture with everyone! You never know where and when you will meet someone!

7. You’ve got to kiss a lot of frogs....

This brings me to my next point....you’ve got to kiss a lot of frogs! Each date is an opportunity to meet a new person, friend, acquaintance. Every date will NOT be THE ONE. Find a way to enjoy meeting new people. Expand your network. Begin to learn to appreciate each date’s good qualities and remember...you don’t have to go out with him a second time. But, be polite...you never know who he knows!

8. Creating Your Story

This is one of the most important plays in the book! It goes back to “be what you want to attract”. No one...not friends, DATES, colleagues, family....want to hear bad mouthing, bitter, resentful and victimized comments and conversations. This is an important time to manage and control your emotions, comments and conversations. Stay focused on the positive and on the forward momentum your life is taking. This is not to say that you can’t be realistic and share what you have learned from your past relationships, but name calling, bitter and an unpleasant “story” is a sure way to never get a callback! Create your STORY!

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9. Red Flags

Red flags are exactly what they seem, RED FLAGS! Recognize them. If it doesn't seem right...it usually isn't. You didn't change your ex-husband, you are not going to change another person either. There are so many wonderful people in the world...you don't need to "overlook" those things you don't like. Be aware of your connections to people and be honest about what your experiences are. You want to make good choices and manifest what you really want in your life and relationships.

10. Be your glorious you!

You are bold, brave and beautiful! You have taken steps to move forward in your life and you hold the playbook! Play fair, play honest and play big! And don't forget to have fun. Good luck!

About Laura Campbell: Laura Campbell, Founder of The D Spot, is a Divorce and Life Transition Coach. The D Spot helping women regroup, renew and reinvent themselves before, during and after divorce. Contact Laura at discoverthedspot@gmail.com or by visiting www.discoverthedspot.com.



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Children Who Feel Loved Are More Loving

“The prime cause of anger and misbehavior is an empty love tank.”-Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, the Five Love Languages of Children

“How many of you think your parents loved you as a child? Now, how many of you felt loved as a child?” Author, Louise Hart, wrote that when she speaks to parent groups she asks those two questions and consistently gets the same response. When she asks the first question most of the hands in the room go up, on the second question just a sprinkling of hands remains

Knowing we are loved is not the same as feeling loved. Knowing the sun is shining by seeing it out the window is a very different experience than going outside and feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin. Children need to know they are loved and they need to feel loved by us and connected to us. Feeling loved and connected is the emotional fuel that gets them through the day.

We may ask, “With all I do for my children, how could they not feel loved?” Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell address that question in their book, The Five Love Languages of Children. They tell us that doing things for children (acts of service) is only one of the ways that we make children feel loved. Chapman and Ross identify and describe the following five love languages of children:

- Physical Touch – Receiving healthy, loving touch like hugs and backrubs
- Quality Time - Spending special time together having fun one on one
- Words of Affirmation – Hearing that we notice, love, and appreciate them
- Gifts – Being given gifts, in addition to, not instead of, other forms of love
- Acts of Service – Being taken care of and helped when they need it

While all of these languages communicate love, and children need all of them to feel loved, Chapman and Ross explain that every person has a primary love language and they emphasize the importance of parents discovering and speaking each child’s primary love language.

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We tend to show our love by doing for others the things that make us feel loved. If a parent's primary love language is "acts of service" but the child's primary love language is "words of affirmation," though our acts of service let her know she is loved, acts of service don't make her feel loved. She won't feel loved unless she hears words of love, appreciation, and affirmation. Nurturing touch is the primary love language of all infants. If a child's primary love language is touch, it will be hugging him, play wrestling with him, or giving him a backrub that will make him feel loved.

Making it a priority to do the things that make children feel loved creates an upward parenting spiral. When children are feeling loved they feel happy and are more positive, more cooperative, more loving, and more lovable. Not making it a priority to do the things that make children feel loved creates a downward parenting spiral. When children don't feel loved, they feel unhappy, and become negative, uncooperative, unloving, and less lovable.

Keeping children's love cup (emotional fuel tank) filled is the key to effective parenting. When children feel loved and connected they care about what we need and feel. It is only when children care about what we need and feel that they respond to parental guidance. When children are low on emotional fuel they become anxious, stressed, and angry. The more time we spend filling children's love cup the less time we will spend trying to control children's anxious, stressed, angry behavior.

It's difficult to focus on filling our children's love cup when our own love cup is low or empty. Parents have their primary love language too. What makes you feel most loved? Is it receiving a shoulder rub (touch), hearing 'Wow! You look beautiful!' (words of affirmation), someone making a meal for you (acts of service), having special time together (quality time), or receiving a surprise gift (gifts)? When parents learn to speak each other's primary love language, it's a win-win for the whole family. We are much better equipped to fill a child's love cup when our love cup is filled. Single parents need support from family and friends to help them fill their children's love cups and to keep their own love cup level up.



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The less time we have with our children the more important it becomes to make sure we spend some of that time filling their love cup. Parenting is a challenging journey, but when we remember to keep the emotional fuel tanks full, the trip is a lot more fun for everyone.

Resources:

- The Five Love Languages of Children by Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell, M.D.
- The Winning Family: Increasing Self-Esteem in Your Children and Yourself by Louise Hart
- Connection Parenting by Pam Leo

About the Pam Leo: Pam Leo, mother of two grown daughters and grandmother of three, is the author of Connection Parenting-Parenting (<http://www.connectionparenting.com>) through Connection Instead of Coercion, through Love instead of Fear. Pam facilitates her Connection Parenting classes in Maine, and is a tele-seminar instructor for the Academy for Coaching Parents International (<http://www.acpi.biz>).



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10 Ways to Say *I Love You* to Your Partner without Using Words

- Greet your partner at the front door with a kiss and offer to hang up belongings.
- Ask him how his day was and really listen, *before* you tell him all of the reasons your kids pushed your buttons.
- Have a romantic, candlelit dinner in your dining room after the kids are settled for the night. Fix your favorite restaurant meal (steak, fish) in the comfort of your own home. To make it extra special, ask your teenage son or daughter to serve you your meal (if at all possible)!
- Make his favorite birthday meal or dessert out of the blue. Preparing something special unexpectedly is a labor of love and lets him know you were thinking of him for no other reason than- *just because*.
- Set aside time each day to do something with your spouse **only**. Play a game; have a one on one conversation and ask the kids to leave you alone; take a walk; run an errand; watch a movie.. Remember this person is most likely your best friend, so spend time with them as such.
- Have a date night. Be spontaneous and go somewhere you've never been before. Make an effort to avoid doing the same thing when planning your date night or it will eventually become routine. If you have the opportunity, stay over night at a bed and breakfast or a nice hotel so you can sleep as late you want the next day.
- When your partner shares an authentic feeling with you, truly hear what he's saying, don't just listen. Often times we miss the early cues when something is bothering our significant other, because we are too busy trying to point out how they were at fault too. Hear what she is saying and acknowledge her feelings as important, regardless of what you think.

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- Don't keep a score card for who does what. We all carry the extra load at times, but the more we are aware of the imbalance, the more imbalances we will create. Enjoy what you're doing in the moment and remember we each have our own expectations for how we want things to be and we project that expectation onto our partner. Remember not all things need to become a major issue.
- Be silly together. Run around the house after the kids or dance to songs on the radio. Play monsters or hide and seek and don't worry about how you look. One of the things we loved most about our partner when we first met was how much fun we had together.
- Except your significant other simply for who they are. The most powerful love is love unspoken or unconditional love which allows each of us to be who we are meant to be. When we expect someone to act or do what we want them to do, we are often disappointed, but trusting each person is being lead on their journey and accepting that, can transform a relationship like nothing else.

About Tara Paterson: Tara received her parent coach certification through the [Academy for Coaching Parents](#) International and is currently the only one with an accreditation for Coaching Parents with Intuitives; is a trainer for the Academy in the specialty niche- *Parenting Intuitive Children*; is a nationally syndicated columnist for *American Chronicle* newspapers and is a parenting advisor for [ParentalWisdom.com](#) and [Momference.com](#).

Tara was nominated as the 2002 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, and was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year in 2003 by a Northern Virginia networking group. She has also been seen on *CNN*, the *Today Show*, the *Early Show*, *48 Hours* and has been featured in the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, the *Purcellville Gazette*, the *Loudoun Magazine* and quoted in the *USA Today* and *Parenting Magazine*.

Tara Paterson is available for private coaching, presentations, lectures, and workshops. Contact Tara at parentcoach@justformom.com visit www.academyforcoachingparents.com/ici/index.htm. To register for Tara's upcoming tele-classes *Parenting Well Using Your Intuition* or *Parenting Your Spiritually Intuitive Child* (http://www.academyforcoachingparents.com/ici/tara_classes.htm).

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Make Your Reservations Now for A Day of Love!

Valentine's Day is not reserved just for lovers; it is a day devoted to celebrating LOVE! There are many ways to say it, how do you express love for honoring self? What do you love most about you?

Notice that an expression of LOVE does not have to be contingent upon anyone or anything else. It also should not be reserved for Valentine's Day ONLY! Why would you wait to feel beautiful, sexy, love, A Goddess? Get creative with your ways to express yourself, it doesn't have to cost a \$1 and the payoff is priceless.

Schedule one thing for Valentine's Day to HONOR You!

- * Bubble Bath
- * Manicure and Pedicure
- * Favorite Movie
- * Call a Girlfriend
- * Go for a Walk
- * Play your favorite music LOUD and DANCE
- * Wear Sexy Lingerie
- * Wear Red Lipstick
- * Read a Book

You cannot give away that which you do not possess. Imagine how your family will benefit from you honoring yourself first? As Mothers we are called unconditionally to love our children, what would your world be like if you applied the same rule to you? If your internal dialogue, feelings and behavior toward you as an extraordinary woman were from a loving space and put 1st? What I have found through offering Seminars and Coaching for Women over the years is the sequence for Honoring Self is in reverse order; hence, causing chaos vs. harmony. Most Women look to the external world: something, some event or someone to fill their Spirit and have a healthy mindset. By doing this all of her power is given away and control is lost which can lead to a

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frustrated mindset and attitude about self and life. The Secret Formula for Honoring Self must begin with you. Inspiration comes from within allowing us to turn our positive thoughts into reality. Another way to look at it is your external world is a reflection of your internal world. Honoring Self not out of obligation but from a place of inspiration.

There is no greater role than A Mother; she is a sacred haven of love and wisdom. Grant yourself permission today to live as the woman you were intended to be so you can express joyfully in your role as A Mother. Allow honor and love to become a way a life rather than reserving it for only Valentine's Day.

Rituals for Honoring Self as A Lifestyle; Reservations for Life

1. Ask Empowering Questions. Our internal dialogue is always on and always asking questions. My top two questions: Does this serve me? Am I showing up as An Empowered Woman?
2. Good Morning Goddess. Sacred Time devoted to nurturing your Spirit daily. Activities may include meditating, exercising, journaling, bubble bath, reading, dancing or any inspirational ritual of your choice.
3. Goddess Gang. Nurture your Spirit with Girlfriends and Empowered Women weekly.

About Jacqueline Cornaby: For more than a decade, Jacqueline Cornaby has served as an international speaker and experienced life and business strategist. She has a unique ability to offer complex strategies into simple and powerful models than can be applied immediately for fulfilling, lasting results. She toured with Tony Robbins as A Speaker, Lead Coach, and Corporate Trainer. As Founder of Jacqueline International, Inc., A Company focused on offering seminars and coaching to "Empower Your Life and Enterprise," Fortune 500 companies, Organizations, Philanthropic Causes, CEO's, Newsstand Magazines and Private Individuals call upon her for coaching. Her latest CD program titled "Go Goddess Go with Jacqueline" has benefited women worldwide. Jacqueline can be reached at www.jacquelineinternational.com and www.gogoddessgo.com

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My Funny Valentine

Many single mothers feel the same way about Valentine's Day as they do a flu shot. It comes once a year, and if you close your eyes and look the other way you hardly feel a thing. Sound familiar? Well, look lively girls because Cupid is not the only love in town.

But you already knew that, right? Romantic love is the love we pine for. The one that has us howling at the moon and memorizing baseball statistics. It is an undeniable love that sends our hearts soaring. It is strong, deep-rooted, and almost as powerful as a mother's love for her children.

The love that exists between mother and child is uplifting and pure. It is a love laced with security, support, and protection. It is quite simply the embodiment of true love. Then why, I ask you, waste a perfectly good holiday bemoaning the fact that no one sent you roses. I have it on good authority that 15% of American women will send THEMSELVES flowers this Valentine's Day. So, pull out that Visa card and move on to what really matters—Celebrating the love that exists between you and your children.

Celebrating With Your Funny Valentines

For many kids, a holiday without crafts is like lunch without peanut butter. Crafts are a fantastically creative way to round out a celebration, and you get a nifty memento to boot. This Valentine's Day why not take a trip down memory lane, I mean way down memory lane, to find your craft inspiration. The following three project ideas originated in the 19th century, but as far as I am concerned, they are still loaded with fun.

Stick to It. In Wales, wooden love spoons used to be given as gifts. They were decorated with hearts, keys, and keyholes to symbolize that the recipient was capable of unlocking the heart of his or her admirer. What a fun tradition and a fun Valentine's Day craft. For less than ten dollars, you can buy inexpensive wooden spoons, stickers, a box of cards, glue, paint, and ribbons to create love spoons with your children.

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A Penny for Your Thoughts. Vinegar Valentines or Penny Dreadfuls were popular in the 1800 and 1900's. These cards, which sold for a penny, featured garish colors, comical illustrations, and insulting verse. If your family leans towards the sarcastic, perhaps putting a modern spin on the Penny Dreadful is the craft for you. Here, let me get you started—Roses are red, violets are blue....

Connect the Dots. In Denmark, people shared gaekkebrev, which are laughable love notes or joking letters for Valentine's Day. At the end of these notes, the sender signed his or her name in dots. If the receiver guessed who sent it, then the sender got a candy egg at Easter. In light of that whole instant gratification thing, I suggest substituting the Easter egg with some Valentine's Day candy should you decide to make gaekkebrev with your children.

Crafts are just one way of celebrating Valentine's Day with your children. You could also rent a movie, host a love day play, or dine on heart shaped meatloaves. Whatever your heart desires. So what if these celebrations do not include candlelight, lingerie or Godiva chocolate? Will you even miss the oysters, champagne, and pretty baubles? I don't think so. Not if you listen to your heart and declare this day a celebration of true love.

About Karen Gardner: Karen Gardner, ACPI CCP is a recent graduate of the Academy for Coaching Parents International (www.academyforcoachingparents.com). She is a certified parent coach who specializes in single, separated, and divorce parent issues. For more information, visit her website www.ParentWell.net or contact her at ParentWell@gmail.com.



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Hooking Up: Whatever Happened to Crushes?

Steven F., a Cleveland father, came home one day to find his 16-year-old daughter, Jennifer, locked in her bedroom. When he knocked and entered, he found his daughter sitting on her bed with a young man he'd never seen before. They were both fully dressed, but still, he was slightly panicked, because he watched the news and heard all about what teens are up to these days - rainbow parties,* friends with benefits,* and lots of oral sex. He wanted to talk to Jennifer, but he had no idea how to start the conversation.

When we were young, the decision to go "all the way" was a big one. It involved some degree of commitment to a current boyfriend or girlfriend, concern about the loss of virginity, and a sense that once we'd taken this huge step, we could never go back. It also involved a lot of passion and intensely complicated feelings. Today, many teens don't make this type of connection with the sexual act. Hooking up* is more casual and often accepted as a part of a friendly relationship.

In my work as a sex educator in Manhattan schools, I have talked with hundreds of adolescents over the years, and I've discovered that there is a huge range of teen sexuality. In some cases, teens are exploring oral sex, having intercourse, and trying to figure out whether they are gay or straight. But other kids are absolutely dedicated to remaining abstinent until marriage and may be burdened with guilt and shame about the feelings they have to squelch.

Martha Kempner, Vice President of Information and Communications for the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) says, "[Sex] is not more prevalent [than it used to be], but with the advent of the Internet and the popularity of MTV, sex has become more [visible and] talked about. Ultimately, this can be a good thing for parents and teens - it gives parents many opportunities to talk about their values with their children."

So what is happening with teen sexuality? And what can parents do to see that their teenager has appropriate boundaries and knowledge about dipping their toes or jumping headlong into sexual waters?

LOOKING AT SEX THROUGH TEEN EYES

The way in which many teens view sex has changed over the years. Intercourse is still a big deal because of the pressure to keep one's virginity and fear of STDs; yet oral sex, mutual masturbation, and cyber/phone sex are activities that are perceived to have little risk, emotional

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or physical. Girls often solicit sex from boys (or other girls) in order to be accepted by the "cool" crowd. Boys, who mature less quickly, may be overwhelmed by girls' aggressiveness, and give in to their demands after just a little flirting.

The fact that there seems to be so little emotion involved when kids hook up is really unsettling to parents. We would prefer our teens wait to be in loving, respectful partnerships. But at this age, acute physical desire is often part of the package-what can they do about their hormones and very natural desires?

Though teens may make juvenile decisions when it comes to sex, they usually have a rationale for what they're doing.

Emma, 19, from Arizona says, "Some teens crave sex because they aren't getting enough attention at home."

Sara, 14, justifies teen experimentation by her choice of partners. "Sex is still a big deal, but that's why friends are so good to hook up with." She appears to be "saving herself" emotionally for a big relationship, but practicing certain sexual behaviors until she is ready for something more meaningful.

FACE IT - TEENS ARE SEXUAL BEINGS

I know a fair number of parents who virtually stick their heads in the sand to pretend their kids aren't sexual beings. Is it any wonder their teens are acting out! The truth is, as much as it scares you, someday you'll have to talk to your teens openly about sex. Hard as it may be, it will hurt worse if your teens get into trouble sexually.

As parents, we have to tread a fine line between helping our teens develop a healthy attitude about sex, while at the same time staying safe, physically and emotionally. And that begins by acknowledging that we are all sexual beings. We can talk about the fact that love and sex sometimes come together, and sometimes stand alone. It's also vital to explain that good relationships are about trust, respect, and emotional connection.

Maggie, 50, says "I don't want my 15-year-old to sleep around, but I do want her to make good decision." The only way to do this is to talk about ways to handle the situation when the time comes.

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Jon, 54, the father of two daughters, 16 and 14, recognizes that sexual exploration is part of adolescence, and wants his girls to talk to him if they have questions. "I always tell them about the importance of protecting themselves."

TALK, AND KEEP TALKING

By the time most kids hit 12, they know a lot more than you initially told them about birds and bees. That doesn't mean your job is over! If you don't keep talking, you are sending your kids the message that you don't want to discuss sex. And contrary to what you might believe, kids want information about sex from their parents. But they want you to listen TO them and talk with them, rather than talk AT them.

Susan, 45, said, "I was so nervous talking to my 14-year-old son. But I kept thinking that if I didn't talk to him, I was permitting the media to do my job." As it happened, Susan's son wasn't sexually active or sexually interested yet. But he was open to talking to his mother. (Maybe he was just humoring her!)

Barbara, 47, added, "My 16-year-old daughter asked me a question that I didn't know the answer to, but we looked it up together. I think this made me seem more human."

If you don't understand what your kid is talking about, you need to get more information. (See the glossary at the end of this article if you think you're behind the times.)

USE THE RIGHT WORDS

The best way to open lines of communication is to get your teen to come to you for information and support. At that point, you can ease your way slowly into a number of hot topics. Here are some conversation openers:

1. "I know you get a lot of mixed messages about sex. What's the general feeling about hooking up among your friends?"
2. "Saying 'no' to someone is really hard. Do you ever practice different ways of saying that you just aren't ready?"
3. "You sound pretty serious about this person. Are you ready to see a gynecologist?"
4. "You sound like someone's trying to pressure you to be sexually active. If you're not interested, that's perfectly normal."

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5. "Date rape and forced sex is very scary. Do you know anyone who's ever gone through this experience?" (It's important to get both boys and girls to talk about date rape.)
6. "If you are having sex-we need to discuss how to do it safely."

Last, remember, if you choose to, you are allowed to put your foot down. You can say, "If you're 14, you shouldn't be having sex with a partner."

DEAL WITH THE DOWN SIDE TOO

Unfortunately, date rape, peer pressure, and other types of nonconsensual sex "are unfortunate realities of the society we live in", says Amy Levine, founder of [Sex Ed Solutions](#). "Parents shouldn't wait for these moments to appear, but should be proactive by sharing the information in advance, through reading a news story, watching a television show together, and then talking about that they've seen."

BEING HONEST WITH THEM AND TRUE TO YOURSELF

What we do as teenagers helps us to build the foundation for our future relationships and our ability to communicate intimately with another person. Our sexual experiences also add to our sense of self and our body image. So instead of locking up our sons and daughters until they turn 21, we should try to give them the skills and information necessary to become sexually healthy.

As for Steven, whom we met at the opening of the article, he decided to hold his ground and enforce the "no closed door" rule in his home. Whatever your rules may be, you should try to explain your rationale-it may begin an important dialogue between you and your teenager about love, sex, and yes, crushes. They do still exist, along with hooking up. They're an important part of growing up, and you can make a difference in the way your teen handles them. Visit our Teen

Sex Glossary at:

http://www.parentingteensonline.com/issue/article/name/September_2007/title/Hooking_Up__Today_s_Dating/page/4

By Logan Levkoff, M.S. (first published in www.ParentingTeensOnline.com)



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The Cheerios Path to Love

Taking a new look at a situation – through the eyes of your soul, instead of through the lens of your logic – can change its outcome and your relationship with the people in that situation. In the following story, a different perspective helped a young mom create a happy and loving ending to a day with her toddlers.

When my children were two and four years old, my life was a marathon. Sometimes I was more exhausted than a runner at the end of a long-distance race. One morning when I was particularly tired, I sat down on my daughter's bed, tucked each child next to me and began reading a stack of our favorite children's books. In the cozy, quiet warmth, I fell asleep without realizing it. I awoke with a start and found that I was alone on the bed. After reassuring myself that the house was toddler-proof and that no one could get hurt, I hurried across the room.

As I stepped into the hallway, I was greeted by a sea of Cheerios. The contents of an economy-sized cereal box were strewn across every inch of the hall, the family room and eating area. My children were sitting joyfully in the midst of the mess, picking little O's off the floor and eating them, one by one. My initial reaction was nearly panic. Besides feeling rather annoyed that there was yet one more mess to clean up, I was upset because a worker (whom I had assured that I kept a clean house) was due to arrive momentarily to find out why there were so many ants coming into the family room.

As calmly as possible, I asked my children what happened. They explained that first they were Hansel and Gretel, who had left a trail of bread crumbs. Then they had become birds and they were eating the crumbs. Their delight over the situation was apparent.

It was clear to me that they were fascinated by a story we read together. It was then that I realized that it was my actions – not theirs - that would continue to make this a positive situation for them and a better one for me, or create an unhappy ending for all of us.

Rather than seeing this as another mess to clean up, I saw it as a moment for humor. I grabbed my camera, photographed Hansel and Gretel's path of Cheerios and mailed the picture with the tale of her grandchildren's antics to my mother. More than a decade later, this story has become

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part of our family's history, a legend of the funny things the kids did when they were little. It has been repeated in our children's English compositions and a photo remains in the family album.

This situation – seen through the eyes of the soul – and its story helped us define who we are in relationship to each other. We are not housekeeper and mess-makers, nor rivals on opposite sides. We are mother and children; we are companions who can laugh. Who would guess that a path of Cheerios would lead us to the realization of how much we love each other!

About Carol Metzker: "The Cheerios Path to Love," excerpt from Seven Gems By Carol Metzker, Carol@ServeforSuccess.com, 610-793-4387



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Solo (or so low) on Valentines Day

Valentines Day, the day to recognize and celebrate your sweetheart, can be a dreaded day if you're single. I was in a wonderful relationship for over 2 decades. We celebrated Valentines Day every year with flowers, candy, cards, dining out without the kids, and wonderfully warm sex that night. I loved that day, (and many others like it) being so secure and happy with my husband. Now divorced (and that's another whole story!), I can't help but remember those special days. This year, I'm solo for Valentines Day, and I have choices on how that day will go for me. I want to share with you some tips, in case you find yourself in my shoes, that is, *house shoes*...home alone, in your bathrobe, on Valentines Day Evening.

First, face the day. Don't let Valentines Day sneak up on you, hitting you like a brick, as coworkers gush over their plans with their special someone. Face it, the day is coming, so take some time to plan for it. Ask yourself, "How can I pamper myself that day?" Need some suggestions? Here's some to try:

1. Schedule a massage. This is something I rarely do for myself, so it's a treat. It's therapeutically great for the body, and involves human touch. Sometimes being touched is essential! Relax and allow the pampering. Taking my own advice, as I'm writing this, I just called and booked a massage for myself!
2. Plan a dinner with your single friends. Go out early in the evening to a wonderful restaurant. (If you go late, you may have to put up with couples making out, giving gifts and going ga ga goo goo around you!) If you feel up to it, you could host a dinner at your place for your single girlfriends. They would feel special and pampered, it would give them something to do for the night, and it's another way of acknowledging that it's OK to be where you're at right now.
3. Buy yourself some sexy lingerie. Ya know, no one needs to know that you're wearing it all day on Feb 14th! It's a treat for you...and you'll feel sexy just knowing you've treated yourself to special lacy stuff! Do it just for you! It's much better for the self esteem than ratty old house shoes and a frayed robe.

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4. If you decide to stay in, watch movies, and just hang out with yourself, OK! But, don't watch romance. Are you trying to inflict pain? Get a mystery, CSI type, or off the wall humor. Be good to you!
5. Send yourself a card. I know, this sounds kinda "out there"...but hey, it may cheer you up! Find a card that describes wonderful you! Or a funny one that makes you laugh out loud. Pop it in the mailbox...and then on Valentines Day, when it arrives in the pile of mail...it's sure to bring a smile to your face.

Let your self talk be nurturing. If you find yourself down and out, you can pick yourself up by beginning to dream a little. Just dream about one year from now. What kind of man are you with? My guy looks like Richard Gere. (It's my dream, so I get to pick! :)) Where are you going for dinner? See yourself in that dream. If it's not being a couple, then are you traveling? Just **what would you want to be doing?** One of my favorite author's is Mike Dooley. He talks about "thoughts becoming things, so choose the good ones." If you believe this, then you need to allow your thoughts to be positive, fun, uplifting, and encouraging. Guess what? We can pick the thoughts we have...and stop the ones that make us feel miserable! So, dreaming about what you want to happen can open up some very interesting events.

Finally, there are other things that you could be going through that are much worse than being alone on Valentines Day. Ask my sister, diagnosed with breast cancer and facing chemotherapy. You can find examples in your own circle of life. This is not that high on the tragedy meter...try to keep it in perspective. Life has a way of changing and bringing good times and bad. Roll with this one...and you'll be OK. But honey, plan ahead to make sure of it!

By Linda Ward, MA, CC *is an experienced counselor and coach. She has a rich background, many life experiences, and genuine effective communication skills to put you at ease through your life challenge. For more information, see Linda's bio at www.letusinspireu.com or email her at lward@letusinspireu.com.*



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How to Cherish Valentines Day!

Valentine's Day is a cherished day by many. But the media has transformed it into one more place for competitive consumerism. Of course every child in every class must receive a card from every other child. But what about in your own family? How can you have a Valentine's Day that has the original meaning of expressing love?

First, set up a Valentine's Card making area in your house. Have plenty of doilies, rubber cement, sparkles, magic markers, and red and pink construction paper. Have your children make valentines for each member of the family. Encourage them to write about one special trait that they love in the person they are giving the card to. Let them know it is a card and can be short or long, funny or sentimental. Encourage some secrecy in this.

Second, got to the library and get a few books on Valentine's Day. Children love books! When you take the time to read the books you are taking time to be with your children in a special way. If you are harried and find it difficult to find the "proper" time then don't wait for it. Just read the book wherever you are and for however long you have. And if you don't finish that moment tell your kids that now we all have the ending to look forward to.

Third, on or around Valentine's Day have your children call their grandparents and other special adults in the extended family. This helps them to know how to express real love for others without having to feel that love and bought objects must go together. Of course giving and receiving gifts and cards can be really fun, but be sure it is done with love and consideration of the other in mind. If you put together a list of people for your child to send cards to, be sure to say why each person is added to the list.

When you create Valentine's Day to be a day of love rather than a day of consumerism you will teach your children one of the basic components of self-esteem. To be able to give love and caring away without attachments one must have a solid sense of well-being.



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Self-esteem and well-being allow your child to love others without needing or expecting anything in return. The funny thing is when love is given without needing any return love then return love always flows right back. But when love is given with needs and expectations the return love does not flow as freely.

When you give your family a Valentine's Day filled with real love rather than obligatory love you will give your family a lovely start on the journey of high self-esteem

Grace E. Mauzy

Grace E. Mauzy, MA works with overwhelmed, stressed parents having difficulty comfortably cope with parenting. Parents learn positive intervention utilizing strategies and tactics to develop high self-esteem in children. Grace is the founder of GEM Parenting – an online community dedicated to parenting with passion, purpose, and integrity. And raise their children with confidence, peace, and harmony. To learn more about her powerful speaking, coaching, and workshops, or to receive Grace's motivating audio course-7 Deadly Mistakes Parents Make That Create Spoiled Brats and How to Avoid Them- visit <http://www.GEMParenting.com>.



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The Secrets of Positive Co-Parenting

How many times have you watched another parent handle a situation, only to think to yourself, "That's not how *I* would have done it!" Never? A few? Many? ...and maybe that was in *your own house*?!

"He's too strict."

"She's too lenient."

Given the varied life experiences, upbringings, and temperaments of people in the world, it should come as no surprise that parental conflict occurs when raising children. You're bound to disagree on minor things, and perhaps even a few of the larger issues that come your way. However, the differences themselves don't matter as much as *what you do about them*

The good news is that if you have been having difficulties reconciling parenting styles up to this point, there are a few simple strategies that can be very helpful in bridging the gaps.

Communication & planning are key ...

Your first reaction might be "That's not how I would do it," when parenting styles clash. However, instead of getting caught up in an "I'm right" mentality which ultimately leads to a "win-lose" or even "lose-lose" outcome, consider planning a better response. Here are some proactive strategies that may help reduce conflict before it occurs::

Communicate: Take time to discuss each other's parenting styles and values. Work on listening to your partner as carefully as you would like them to listen to you. Understanding your partner's values is the first step in better understanding his/her reactions, and is the first step in the ultimate formation of shared goals or values.

Be aware (of yourself and others): Think back to past conflicts and ask yourself: *Why did I react that way?* What reasons or emotions may have been behind the response or reaction of *others*? Be aware of how your own childhood could be influencing how you react to your child or



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your co-parent, and assess if your reaction is a good fit for current situations. If not, it is time to work on replacing your preconditioned responses with something better suited for today.

Take ownership (your actions/inaction): When parental conflict does occur, don't play the blame game, either at the time of or after the fact. Try to limit re-occurrences by examining what role *your* actions or non-actions played in causing or escalating the situation. How were *you* partially or fully responsible for the conflict with your partner?

Although you may disagree on the "how", remember that most parents want the same "what"—what is best for their kids. With that in mind, just remember to stay calm and compassionate, and try to never undermine your partner or co-parent in front of your children.

Another strategy that has worked for many parents is to quickly assess which of you feels strongest about the situation (and a certain course of action), and as long as it does not violate the other's core values, support that partner's handling of the situation. You can always discuss it later—privately and away from the kids.

Identify your "triggers" ...

Another useful exercise can be to identify your "triggers"—actions that tend to set you off, or result in an almost automatic response on your part. By identifying certain behaviours that tend to provoke a reaction on your part, you will raise your awareness of each trigger's existence, and be able to better plan an appropriate response. This exercise can also provide a good starting point for discussion between parents, as you share the actions or situations that cause you stress or concern—helping to deepen a potential co-parent's understanding of situations.

For example, on the list below, check off any actions or situations that act as "triggers" for you. Feel free to add additional examples to the list. Then rate the intensity of your reaction to each of the identified situations using a scale from 1-10, with 1 being mild and 10 representing an extreme response.



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Rating: Action / Situation:

_____ When my child is verbally disrespectful to me or others.

_____ When my child lies to me.

_____ When my child is embarrasses me in public.

_____ When my child ignores or purposefully disobeys me.

_____ When my child physically hurts others.

_____ When my child has a tantrum or asks spoiled.

_____ When my child is physically aggressive towards me.

_____ When my child _____

_____ When my child _____

Consider counseling ...

However, if you are still unable to resolve situations and/or reach some acceptable level of compromise on an ongoing basis, I would strongly suggest seeking professional help such as a professional coach, councilor or therapist who could help you work through and resolve the issues at hand.

Parents who openly discuss their views are better able to defuse or even avoid potential parenting power struggles. The key is to be proactive and deal with any situations that occur in a timely manner. After all, parenting is hard enough without getting into power struggles with a partner.



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About the Rob Stringer: Rob Stringer, BA, BEd, CPC is an award-winning Educator and Parenting & Personal Success Coach who is passionate about supporting students and families live lives they LOVE! In addition to private & group coaching, Rob also appears regularly in magazines across North America, offers workshops & keynotes, and is the host of *The Parenting with Intention Radio Hour*. To find out more and subscribe to his free monthly newsletter, visit www.ParentigWithIntention.ca or contact Rob at Rob@ParentingWithIntention.ca.



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The Bedroom of Choice

"We have kids." That is the answer I hear most often at my store, Bedroom Matters, to the question of spicing up your bedroom. It is also an answer I refuse to accept.

When I grew up, you had to knock on my parent's door before you entered. It was a house rule -- just like making my bed every morning, emptying the dishwasher when I got home from school, or doing my homework before watching TV. Bedroom privacy is something that is dictated by the parents. Leaving the family on the other side of the door is not abandonment, but rather the greatest gift you can give to them by creating a space for relaxation and rejuvenation just for you.

The mission of Bedroom Matters is to make the bedroom a sensual haven: One bedroom at a time. From interior design to lingerie to enhancing play, I've got ten simple suggestions to create a bedroom environment you can truly embrace. Read the list and try to come up with a real reason why you can't do any one of them. They're not challenges, they're choices. When you realize that, you realize how easy it is to make the bedroom your sensual and sacred center.

1. Knock three times. When you know that you've got real privacy in the bedroom, you have created a whole new world. You will feel a new sense of empowerment knowing you have your own special, private space. One that requires an invitation to enter. You trained your children to use the potty, you can train them to knock.

2. Get dressed for bed. Lingerie is the single most luxurious thing a woman can do for HERSELF. Lingerie feels better, fits better, is sexy and creates an image of yourself that you carry with you all the next day. You get dressed to go to work every day, make sure you do the same each night. And make it count.

3. No Law & Order allowed. TV is more than a distraction from more pleasurable endeavors; it's the start of horrible night's sleep. You may drift off, but you're still actively listening whether you think its background noise or not. Try nature sounds or a white noise machine to lull yourself to bed and get that TV out of there. Added bonus: If there's no TV, the kids are less likely to go into your room.

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- 4. Mirror mirror off the wall.** Mirrors in the bedroom can be dangerous “reminders” in the evening hours. We’re tired and most critical of our bodies at this time. You might as well have your mother in the room staring you down. Get it out of there or put it on the inside closet door. Besides, it’s bad feng shui!
- 5. Bring the sexy back.** Sex releases endorphins that help you fall asleep. And it makes you feel better about yourself. Honestly, it makes for happier relationships all around. No partner? You know what to do, ladies.
- 6. Scents make sense.** Smells are visceral triggers. Chocolate chip cookies baking still make you think of home, right? Find a single scent that creates a relaxing, sensual mood and use it every night before bed. Light a candle thirty minutes prior to heading to bed to infuse the room and simply blow it out before laying down. The results will astound you.
- 7. Rituals for bedtime.** In old movies we watch the starlet brush her hair 100 times or apply hand lotion at her vanity before heading off to bed. These evening rituals trigger your brain that it is time to relax and prepare for slumber. Just having one or two personal rituals can increase your ability to fall restfully to sleep dramatically.
- 8. Photographic memory.** The bedroom is your haven from the outside world, so don’t bring it back in with family photos. The only photos in your bedroom should be of you and your partner. Or maybe a sexy boudoir shot of yourself? Let’s be practical here, do you really want your kids or parents watching you sleep, get dressed, or God forbid, have sex?
- 9. Acknowledge your body.** Every night before you go to bed, do or say one beautiful thing about your body. Love your collarbone? Caress it in the mirror and let your inner vixen go! Or rather than slathering on lotion indiscriminately, put it on one part of your body as slowly as you can and really embrace that body part as you do. Massage oil is a great alternative. It smells great and you can’t rush it, you have to really rub it in. It’s a gorgeous way to “see” your body through touch.



10. What's in the box? Everyone should have a pleasure box. I don't care if you never use it, have one. Make it beautiful, and put it out if you can. Just knowing it's there will do more for your libido and your imagination than anything else. Have fun with it! Intimate objects, erotica, maybe even a sexy blindfold. It's there to be used, but even the reminder will go a long way to making your bedroom a lot more fun that it is now. I promise!

About Bedroom Matters: Bedroom Matters is located at 20 Railroad Place, Westport, CT. The store specializes in bringing sensuality back into your life by using the bedroom as a platform for fun and intimacy. The store also holds regular classes on relationships, intimacy and design. For our latest products and classes go to www.bedroommatters.com.



Bedroom Matters LLC, 20 Railroad Place, Westport, CT 06880
play@bedroommatters.com or www.bedroommatters.com



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Valentine's Day Romance? Save It for March

At the risk of betraying my sex, I'd like to put a big heart-shaped kibosh on the vast Valentine's Day industrial complex. I like romance as much as the next gal, but in my sometimes humiliating experience, Valentine's Day is more likely to sink a love boat than float it.

For starters, the fevered anticipation sets women up for unrealistic expectations, far beyond the ability of men who are still recovering from the Super Bowl. Once when I was single, my boyfriend dutifully anted up with the requisite long-stemmed red roses. I swooned with happiness, as I had been waiting 23 years to receive long-stemmed red roses. (Yes, this means I had been waiting since birth!) Yet my happiness lasted only a nanosecond, because they were the saddest, droopiest looking rosebuds in the history of horticulture. In a moment of horrifying clarity, the roses became an omen: If they bloomed, I'd end up sporting a diamond ring. But if they stalled in the bud stage . . . well, that outcome was simply unspeakable.

With no other prospective boyfriends on the horizon, failure to thrive was not an option. In a Valentine's Day-induced panic, I called a florist, describing the roses' symptoms in detail. (In retrospect, no rosebuds could have bloomed in a small apartment where I had sucked up all available oxygen with my neurosis.) I attempted gardening CPR: clipping their stems at 45 degree angles, refilling the vase with water that was exactly 92 degrees (good thing I had a thermometer handy), and administering aspirin to the water, even though I was the one with the headache. If I had been offered roses on February 13 or 15, I would have enjoyed them for as long as they lasted. But because it was February 14, I worried myself sick over their condition instead. Is this any way to run a romance?

For women without significant others, February 14 creates a hostile environment unlike any other. They must bravely face down supermarket aisles bursting with pink greeting cards, chocolate samplers, and guys on street corners waving fragrant bouquets of flowers in their faces. True, women have never needed men to enjoy high-octane raspberry filled truffles. In fact, guys are often a nuisance during otherwise intimate chocolate moments. And valiant singles will simply pretend that February 14 is just any other day, no more significant than Fish Amnesty Day, while



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subconsciously stopping at Marshall Field's for a new bauble before settling down with DVDs starring George Clooney and Matthew McConaughey.

Men don't have it much better. For them, February 14 is a day of heart-shaped extortion, costing them roughly the same as the looming federal heist of April 15. Men are on the hook for a good dinner out (guys, this means a place where you don't order standing up) and some bling-worthy jewelry, pending solitary confinement on the couch for two weeks. But men who find themselves in this sad state can at least take succor in their fantasy league baseball while their women cool off.

For my money, a man is at his most romantic when he is wearing something really sexy, such as a dish towel slung over his shoulder while he scrubs a pot. Diamonds may be forever, but so is the lingering memory of a man going *mano a mano* with a Dustbuster, neatening up the house before showering for his ladylove. Candy is dandy, and jewelry looks cool on me, but I'd rather get them in March or July – just about any other day without an implied threat: Show me you love me, or else!

About Judy Gruen:

Judy Gruen's latest hilarious book is *The Women's Daily Irony Supplement*. Her work has also appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, Los Angeles Times, Ladies' Home Journal, and many other publications. Read more of her work on judygruen.com. Judy Gruen can be contacted through email at jlgruen@sbcglobal.net.



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