

Steps to Improving Your Love Life

Paul David, Ph.D.

John Gottman's research on sexuality in committed relationships has found that open communication about this awkward subject is a vital component in maintaining a passionate and loving relationship. Some of the key steps that Gottman (2012) recommends to help couples improve communication about their love life are as follows:

Step 1. Assess Your Satisfaction: Take the quiz on the next page assessing the sex, romance, and passion in your relationship. Then go over the results with each other. Be sure to follow the instructions at the end of the quiz for discussing the results.

Step 2. Establish a Protocol: For many couples, a customary procedure or ritual for communicating about sex can ensure that lovemaking remains a priority. Discuss and agree on a protocol for how you want to initiate and respond to requests (including saying no) for sex.

Step 3. Divulge Your Wants & Needs: One significant obstacle couples often experience in trying to improve their love life is finding the words to ask about how they can best pleasure and meet the other's need. Take turns in discussing the following topics:

- Your perspectives about intimacy.
- How your sex drive affects you.
- What you like and don't like about your body.
- How you like touching and being touched.
- The ways in which you like to achieve orgasm.

Step 4. Explore Romantic Phrases: Partners typically have different phrases they use to express their intimate sentiments before and during lovemaking. Consider more consciously including these phrases to express the ways in which you become turned on before and during lovemaking. Consider including phrases like the following: "I'm all yours," "I love cuddling with you," "You're always mine," "You're so hot," "I love how strong you are," "Your eyes are so beautiful," "You smell so good to me," "I love coming with you," "I want you so much," "You're precious to me," "That was the best," "This is so delicious," "Put your arms around me," etc. Better yet, come up with your own unique phrases.

Step 5: Propose Ways to Make your Love Life More Enjoyable: Once you explore your wants, needs, and pillow talk ideas, try some of the suggestions on the last page for making your sex life more exciting.

Reference

Gottman, J. M., Silver, N. (2012). *What makes love last?* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Assessing Your Love Life*

Name _____

Date _____

Instructions: For each statement, circle T for True or F for False. Then use the space below to elaborate on your response for later discussion. For example, if you think statement number 1 is true—that your relationship is becoming less passionate—you could explain your answer by writing, “We used to have sex every other night, now we have it once every two weeks.”

1. Our relationship is becoming passionless, the fire is going out. T F
Explain: _____
2. My partner expresses love, respect, and admiration much less frequently now. T F
Explain: _____
3. We rarely touch each other. T F
Explain: _____
4. We have few tender or passionate moments. T F
Explain: _____
5. There are some definite problems with our sex life. T F
Explain: _____
6. The frequency of sex is a problem. T F
Explain: _____
7. The degree of satisfaction I get from sex in this relationship is a problem. T F
Explain: _____
8. Being able to just talk to each other about sex, or talk about sexual problems, is a serious issue between us. T F
Explain: _____
9. We rarely cuddle. T F
Explain: _____
10. The two of us want very different things sexually. T F
Explain: _____
11. My partner does not know what turns me on. T F
Explain: _____
12. Differences in desire are an issue in this relationship. T F
Explain: _____
13. The amount of love in our lovemaking is a problem. T F
Explain: _____
14. The level of satisfaction my partner gets from sex is a problem. T F
Explain: _____

*Adapted from *What Makes Love Last?*

15. My partner does not show that he or she finds me sexually attractive. T F
 Explain: _____
16. I do not usually demonstrate sexual attraction toward my partner. T F
 Explain: _____
17. My partner does not compliment my appearance. T F
 Explain: _____
18. I am dissatisfied with the ways we initiate sex. T F
 Explain: _____
19. It's not okay with my partner if I refuse sex. T F
 Explain: _____
20. It seems as if I often have sex when I don't want to. T F
 Explain: _____
21. We have very few ways to satisfy one another sexually. T F
 Explain: _____
22. My partner doesn't listen to or doesn't remember how I like to be touched during sex. T F
 Explain: _____

Scoring & Interpretation

Instructions: Add up your “False” responses. Use a calculator to divide that number by 22 and multiply by 100. The result is your sexual satisfaction (SS) score. Indicate your SS here: _____

ABOVE 80%: Your relationship is strong in affection, sex, romance, and passion. Working through the steps for improving communication can help maintain your erotic enjoyment of each other.

BETWEEN 50-80%: You are grappling with some sexual issues. Following the steps for improving your communication will help you reverse course.

BELOW 50%: Your relationship faces serious sexual issues that are probably undermining your bond. Following the steps for improving your communication will increase your understanding and support of each other's sexual needs.

Discussing the Results

Now that you know your SS score, it's time to start opening up, or divulging more, about what you want from your love life. Why not go first? (Somebody has to.). In discussing the results, adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Read at least some of your explanations for your responses out loud. Start with your “False” responses, so the discussion begins on a positive note. Did you agree on each item?
2. Now discuss where you disagreed. Take turns being the listener. Pay attention to each other's descriptions of feelings and needs. Turn what you want from your partner into a wish rather than a criticism. (Instead of, “You never pull hard on my penis even though I keep asking you to”, say “I love it when you pull harder than usual. I'd love it if you did it a lot more.”) Sometimes partners are surprised when one expresses a desire to be touched in a way that contradicts their current mode of lovemaking. Try to avoid being angry, hurt, or judged by what your partner says. Getting

it all out there is what this exercise is all about. If either of you feels in danger of getting too upset, let the other know. Use repairs. If these do not soothe the upset partner, take a break.

Proposals for Making Sex More Exciting*

Feel free to pick and choose from the list below or come up with your own proposals. Select three ideas that you would like to try. Share them with your partner and perhaps plan to incorporate one each week.

1. Talk to each other about your favorite places to kiss and be kissed.
2. At the beginning and end of the day, kiss for at least six seconds.
3. Buy your partner a surprise present.
4. Put your arms around your partner and tell him or her how sexually irresistible (or handsome, or beautiful) he or she is to you right now.
5. For a day or two, hug, kiss, touch, and caress your partner the way *you* would like to be loved. Then do to your partner what your partner has done to you. Be gentle.
6. Plan a sexual rendezvous in your bedroom. Think about what you will wear, music, lighting. Make sure there is enough time.
7. Use body oil to give your partner a nice, long massage.
8. Buy some sexy lingerie for yourself or your partner.
9. Surprise your partner with your favorite perfume or cologne.
10. Write and read out loud a poem about the wonders of your partner's body.
11. Read an erotic book out loud together.
12. Schedule phone sex with your partner the next time one of you is out of town.
13. Call in late to work one morning after the kids are off to school and have an erotic hour alone together.
14. Have a quickie.
15. Have sex in a new setting.
16. Write your partner a sexy note about where you'd like to lick him or her.
17. Masturbate to orgasm thinking of your partner and write a note about your fantasy.
18. Write your partner about some dirty, naughty sex thoughts that turn you on.
19. Take dirty to your partner during sex.
20. Try the kitchen counter for oral sex.
21. Take turns being the dominant and the love slave.
22. Help your partner to masturbate to orgasm while you watch.
23. Have a pillow fight.
24. During foreplay, guide your partner's hand to demonstrate what feels good and respond with sounds of pleasure.
25. Make a rule: no intercourse tonight, just touching.
26. Give your partner a sexy nickname.
27. Give each other a foot massage.
28. Take turns and kiss, lick, or stroke each other's backs or necks.
29. Gently kiss and suck each other's genitals at the same time.
30. Describe out loud what you love about your partner's face.
31. Try a new sexual position and talk about it afterward. Did it work for you both?
32. Brush and stroke the other person's hair.

*Adapted from *What Makes Love Last?*