

# 7 Simple Tips To Strengthen Your Relationship



By Ed Peterson, LCSW, MBA

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## Introduction

In 1967, The Beatles sang “All you need is love.” But it’s a bit more complicated than that. Let’s be real: romantic love can be amazing, but it can also be so hard and so confusing. Sometimes you need fresh ideas to keep the good feelings rolling with your partner. As life gets tough it becomes crucial to intentionally create moments of love and connection. Don’t lose heart! There are proven ways to keep your love alive. In this guide, I’ll share 7 tips to keep your love strong. These are tips that have worked in my relationship and in the lives of hundreds of friends and clients. Enjoy!

*Ed*



### **Ed Peterson, LCSW, MBA**

Ed is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and couples therapist with advanced training and certification in emotionally-focused therapy (EFT). Ed’s style of therapy is a mixture of empathetic and compassionate listening, active confrontation, and treating the entire family system. Ed is the father of three and happily married to his partner Candace. Ed and Candace own and operate Peterson Family Therapy in Salt Lake City, Utah, and they are founding partners at [The EFT Clinic](#) also in Salt Lake City.

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### Hug More, Hug Longer

Therapist Virginia Satir said:

“We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need twelve hugs a day for growth.”

So true! Hugs are also extremely effective at healing sickness, disease, loneliness, depression, anxiety and stress. And hugs are free! The length of the hug matters. When you hold the hug longer than a few seconds your brain floods the blood stream with Oxytocin, a neurochemical known as the “cuddle hormone.” The longer the hug the more cuddle hormone is released. This dump of Oxytocin makes you feel great. It gives the feeling of bonding, trust, satisfaction, and connection. Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), created by Dr. Sue Johnson, teaches us that this type of Oxytocin experience helps you feel cherished, emotionally bonded, and safe. So, especially when things are tense, hold that hug a little longer. Both you and your partner will feel peace and joy and trust. The hug will communicate that you are emotionally present, safe, and loving.

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### Listen First To Understand, Then To Respond

L.J. Isham wrote:

“Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.”

You will, like everyone, struggle to communicate effectively at times in your love relationships. When in conflict it's hard to listen. Conflict makes us impatient. At times, we are basically just waiting to jump in and tell our partners “how it really is!” But, if you stop and learn to listen first to understand, and then to respond, everything changes for the better.

Ask yourself these questions: do I really care what my partner is saying or am I just biding my time until I can speak? Am I really listening? When in relationship stress you will tend to think quickly and respond quickly, and it rarely goes well. So, slow down and become a better listener. “Listening to understand” is a powerful way to slow down, notice your partner’s body language, and communicate love. Look beyond the words to hear intention. Can your opinion wait a minute? Can you show some patience? We take ourselves so seriously. But if you slow it down and learn to listen you will communicate love and respect. Don’t worry, you will get a chance to speak. But right now, the best thing is to show your partner that you want to listen first to understand and then to respond.

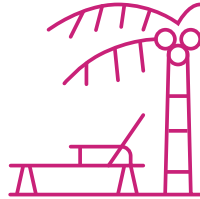
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### Express Radical Gratitude

There are so many distractions in our modern world. You are busy with jobs, kids, hobbies, and worries. You miss chances to connect many times each day. One of the most powerful tools to connect and bond is gratitude. Melody Beattie wrote: "Gratitude turns what we have into enough." This means that pointing out the good in our partner will make any situation better. If you give gratitude out loud your partner will know you see their loving actions and efforts, and it will communicate that you understand their intentions as good and positive. But, beware of the power of social media to eliminate gratitude. The lives you see online are photoshopped and tightly curated, often with little relation to reality. If you spend too much time comparing your real life to the "human highlight" life of others you will often feel more jealous and resentful and less grateful. The best way to show gratitude is to be specific. Try to notice and express exactly why you are grateful. It's ok to say "thanks for dinner" but its better to say "thanks for cooking the onions just the way I like them. When you do that I feel loved." We must push ourselves to find and comment on the good things.

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### Have Fun Together Every Week

Too many couples stop having fun with each other after the first few months or years of their relationship. Remember back to when you first met, when love was fresh and you went on all those creative dates together. Now you need to get creative again and bring back that fun. The good news is that you already know how. Maybe you're just out of practice. It will take some planning and follow through. An old friend of mine and her husband have created a brilliant habit. Alternating each month, one spouse creates a mystery date for the other. They compete to see who can come up with the most creative fun. So smart! We must learn to be creative. Ask yourself: what did we do together at the beginning of the relationship that was fun? Right now, what are my partner's hobbies? What are mine? What can we do together? What is one thing we can do this week to have fun? THEN DO IT.

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### Learn The Art of Saying “I’m Sorry”

Words matter. Couples that bond and trust each other regularly say “I’m Sorry.” Most of the time when you are fighting with your partner there is a pattern of “unintended communication.” One partner expresses a thought or feeling and the other receives or hears a different meaning. This is where a heartfelt “I’m sorry” can radically change the mood and energy of a tense situation.

Margaret Lee Runbeck wrote: “An apology is a lovely perfume; it can transform the clumsiest moment into a gracious gift.”

The nature of life is that people make mistakes and at times hurt each other. A sincere apology is a precious gift. A real apology speaks to your partner’s heart and communicates: “I don’t have all the answers and I make mistakes” and “my intention is to love you not hurt you” and “please let me into your heart.”

The singer Jackson Browne said it all: “Never forget the nine most important words of any family: I love you; You are beautiful; Please forgive me.”

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### Beware of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse

There are four toxic behaviors that have been identified by researcher John Gottman. They, are: **criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling.**

**Criticism**, if not shared with an equal praise, always hurts. Give more positive feedback than negative. Your partner needs to know that you feel more love and respect than criticism.

**Defensiveness** can rear its head when you feel criticized or blamed. It's a normal reaction, but when you feel it you need to quickly take action to soften it and resolve it. The best antidote to defensiveness is taking responsibility.

**Contempt** is a highly toxic emotion and Gottman defines it as "treating others with disrespect or mocking them with sarcasm and condescension." It can also be hostile humor, name-calling, and eye-rolling. Contempt gives the message that not only did you make a mistake but that you ARE a mistake. It creates shame.

Also watch out for **stonewalling**. This is when you shut down emotionally, withdraw, go quiet or silent, and refuse to engage. Dr. Sue Johnson teaches that emotional responsiveness is the key to creating safety and bonding in our relationships. So, if you feel yourself shutting down, take a deep breath and tell you partner the truth. Share that although you feel yourself shutting down that you also have the intention to show love and concern.



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### Do Daily Acts Of Service

Nothing communicates love better than action. Research shows that couples that serve each other are happier and have lower than average divorce rates. But why do so many of us NOT serve each other? Over the years sometimes resentments grow and simmer. You may not say it out loud but you may feel that your partner “doesn’t do much for me, so why should I bother?” That’s dangerous territory. A wise anonymous writer once said: “The most important four words for a successful marriage are ‘I’ll do the dishes.’” So true!

### The Next Step

I hope you find these simple tips useful in strengthening your relationship. If you find yourselves in need of additional guidance, I recommend you explore couples therapy or attend a relationship workshop. Wherever you are, you can find an EFT-trained couples therapist by going to The Center For Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy at [ICEEFT.com](http://ICEEFT.com). EFT is the most effective evidence-based couples therapy in the world. With EFT, 70-75% of couples report moving from distress to recovery and approximately 90% of couples show significant improvements. For more information on EFT please reach out to us at [Peterson Family Therapy](http://PetersonFamilyTherapy.com) ([PetersonFamilyTherapy.com](http://PetersonFamilyTherapy.com))



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