

Keeping the home fires burning

A valentine gift to couples, from relationship experts

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Ah, Valentine's Day, when thoughts turn to romance. Many can recall that giddy feeling of new love and passion. But something happens between the time two people start dating and celebrating years together.

Relationship experts say that “something” is usually familiarity settling in, along with financial pressures, busy schedules, family demands.

Any of these things can fizzle the sizzle in a relationship.

But they don't have to, say Sallie Hildebrandt and Steven Solomon. They are San Diego licensed psychologists who specialize in relationship counseling.

Hildebrandt studied with Roger and the late Theresa Crenshaw, physicians who were trained in sex therapy by the famed Masters and Johnson team of human sexuality researchers.

Solomon, who specializes in couples therapy, is co-author with psychologist Lorie Teagno, of the new book, “Intimacy After Infidelity: How to Rebuild and Affair Proof Your Relationship.”

Part of a strong healthy relationship is a strong, healthy sexual relationship. Hildebrandt and Solomon know, from their private practices, how the latter easily eludes a lot of couples. So, the two therapists were asked to cite the five top complaints men and women have about each other, the issues that get in the way of that strong, healthy relationship.

Both also caution that these are generalizations and, while not applying to every relationship, do apply to the majority. So, too, does their advice for couples looking to rekindle the romance. (See page E2)

“Valentine's Day is a great time to recommit to your relationship,” Solomon says, “to take an honest assessment and learn to be closer.”

WHAT MEN WISH WOMEN UNDERSTOOD

- Women want sex to be more mushy and romantic, but, sometimes, men just want sexual satisfaction.
- Men don't think they get enough sex in their relationship. They want women to be more available.
- Men believe they have to work too hard for sex in their relationship.
- Men feel their partner is not adventurous enough.

Men want women to be more spontaneous, more flirtatious, more available – willing to drop what she's doing to make time for him, for their relationship.

WHAT WOMEN WISH MEN UNDERSTOOD

- Women want men to initiate sexual activity in a more romantic way.
- Women don't like feeling like objects: “He never touches me unless he wants sex.”
- Women feel under siege: “He's always thinking about sex, always wants sex.”
- Men aren't very romantic.

Women do not feel like equal partners, do not feel that men are taking on a fair share of the child care and home care responsibilities, which can allow resentment – and fatigue – to build and replace passion.