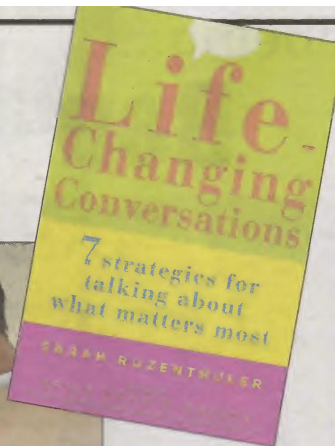




How to get that loving feeling



Love is in the air in February and it's the perfect time to focus on finding a partner, or if you have one already, making that relationship more loving. Check out a romantic strategy to suit your status – single or partnered

Your chance to find love before Valentine's Day

SITTING indoors waiting for Miss or Mr Right to call is unlikely to prove a winning strategy. Writer Katie Wright gives her advice for finding someone special.

Phone a friend

Ask friends if they can set you up with a single friend they think you'll be compatible with.

Blind dates can be nerve-wracking but, with a mutual friend in common, you'll have more to talk about, and that bit of matchmaking could lead, at the least, to a friendship and possibly a long-term love interest.

Class act

Sign up for an evening class to learn a new skill or to further your knowledge on a topic which genuinely interests.

You're likely to meet like-minded people, and chatting in group sessions is a good way to get to know others and there are bound to be opportunities for meeting up after class!

Night at the museum

Lots of museums, galleries and zoos have after-hours events for grown-ups only.

Swap a night at the pub for a night of culture. Sparks might fly when you strike up a conversation at a science exhibition or you could find your own lovebird at the zoo.

Find love online

We work, shop and play on the web, so why not find a date online too?

It's an ideal time to test a site as online dating memberships surge after Christmas.

While you may feel it's a bit random, and for safety on a first date you should always meet in a public place and let a friend or family member know where you're going, there are advantages to accessing a large pool of people who are single like you.

You'll avoid awkward chat-up lines in bars, and you won't waste time approaching people who aren't available. Do your homework first by visiting sites which offer guidance on dating online.

Do a good deed

Volunteering for charity work might not necessarily lead to love but helping others can lead to a different, more positive perspective on your own life, and boost your wellbeing.

That will make you more attractive and interesting to be with, which can't help but raise your chances of success.

Choose a cause that's close to your heart – most charities welcome volunteers with open arms – and even an hour a week can be immensely helpful to a local charity.

Sporting chance

Joining a sports team or club is a classic way to meet new people and will have the benefit of improving your health.

Visit your local leisure centre, gym or local authority to find out what's on offer.

Shall we dance?

There's a huge range of dance classes on offer – from salsa, tango, swing and jive through to ballroom – and you'll learn a new skill, get some exercise, and could meet a life partner.

So get out there and practise fancy footwork and flirting.

HEARTFELT declarations of love, candlelit dinners and flower bouquets are some of the traditional ways to mark Valentine's Day.

But what if you're single? Or what if you're in a partnership but secretly feel it could be more loving and fulfilling?

Couples gazing adoringly at each other in restaurants and romantic gestures and tokens can be hard to bear if, at heart, you're lonely, or that togetherness isn't quite there.

"Relationships need regular care and time and thoughtfulness if they're going to be healthy and stable, and to ensure your partnership survives the inevitable ups and downs of life together," says Sarah Rozenthuler, author of *Life-Changing Conversations: 7 Strategies For Talking About What Matters Most*.

"Romantic or thoughtful gestures to show how much you care should be a regular occurrence and are more important than a showy gift on Valentine's Day," she says.

Rozenthuler gives her advice to help you rekindle the magic and achieve a happier and more harmonious relationship. Sarah Rozenthuler's, top tips for making your partnership more loving.

Techie turn-off

Checking emails, making phone calls, watching TV and online surfing eats away at the time you spend together and can often be an excuse for not communicating, says Rozenthuler.

Give yourselves quality time together during which you have a "media break".

Switch off the technology and focus on each other – even if it's only for 10 minutes.

Share views, clear the air, really listen to what your partner has to say, then reflect back what you've heard.

Resist the temptation to interrupt, let them finish their sentences, and always end on a positive note by saying, for instance, "Thank you for

telling me how you feel".

Listening receptively is a powerful aphrodisiac which can soften the hardest of hearts and avert a row.

Share the dream

A long-standing relationship is all about standing shoulder-to-shoulder, facing the same direction, says Rozenthuler.

For instance, she points out, when a relationship ends, the most painful part is often the loss of shared dreams.

She suggests strengthening your bond by creating a "vision board" together.

Cut out inspiring images from magazines and create a mounted collage. Place it where you can both see it daily so that you consciously connect with what you want to achieve as a couple.

Spice up your sex life

If the physical side of your relationship has become routine, take a risk and do something different.

If you're stuck for ideas, ask your partner for a memory of some great sex they had with you and see what you can learn to re-create some of the excitement of the early days of your relationship.

You might need to have a weekend away from the children so you can enjoy being a couple again, or take more time to enjoy the sensual side of sex by massaging each other, talking and relaxing together.

If there are deep-rooted problems in this important area of your life, seek help so that the lack of physical intimacy doesn't erode your closeness.

Monitor your mood

Partners are susceptible to absorbing each other's moods, which can be positive when one of you has a good day but negative if the other person's bad day at the office contaminates you both.

Develop strategies so you can individually change your mood if you're down in the dumps – it

might be a five-minute walk outdoors or listening to uplifting music.

Each of you needs to take responsibility for your own state of being so that your moods are mutually enriching.

Have fun

A relationship can be hard work as you each try to find ways to accommodate the other's needs, wants and desires, Rozenthuler points out.

Differences of opinion can cause tension and unresolved conflicts can lead to contempt.

Make a mutual commitment to regularly spend time together doing things that you both enjoy, whether it's trips to the cinema, dance classes or planning a holiday.

"Remember that when you fell in love, your inner child felt alive and well and cherished," she says.

"Nurture that part of you and consider ways you can cherish your partner, and your relationship will reap the rewards."

Keep the romance

Thoughtful gestures and actions needn't cost money or take much time but they'll make your other half feel special and appreciated, she says.

"Cook their favourite meal once a week, run them a bath or play their favourite music," Rozenthuler suggests.

"During your day, bookmark memorable moments in your mind to share with your partner when you get home. You probably did that naturally when your love was freshly minted, so bring that attentive energy into your relationship now."

Invest in relationship skills

If your relationship is riddled with tension, get help, says Rozenthuler.

Identify what the core issue is and search out ways to deal with it whether that's getting some couple therapy, asking a GP or specialist for help, or reading books which focus on improving relationships," she says.

