

10 Romantic Resolutions to Make and Keep

By Sara Eckel

Set the tone for a fresh start in your love life.

Reconnect Today

From early January to mid-February you see it -- packed gyms, crowded volunteer centers, and panicked nicotine-addicted friends mercilessly chomping on chewing gum. We like to use New Year's resolutions as a tool for self-improvement, but we rarely extend this spirit to our relationships, which are expected to just drift along on the power of love. "Couples need to let go of the notion that something's wrong if you're not enraptured with each other all the time. After the early enchantment stage, it takes proactive behavior to keep your love alive," says Nina Atwood, therapist and author of *Soul Talk: Powerful, Positive Communication for a Loving Partnership* (Sourcebooks, 2003).

So this year, grab your mate and resolve to make this the best year of your love life.

- 1. We will indulge our shared interests.** Granted, you both are sure to have interests that don't translate. If the very idea of golfing makes you drowsy, then let him spend his time on the green with his friends. Similarly, don't expect him to share your love of scrapbooking. But taking the time to discover some common bonds -- gourmet cooking, photography, mountain-biking -- will bring you closer. "The idea that couples that play together stay together is very true. Like all good things, it takes planning and creativity," says Atwood.
- 2. We will make our partner feel desirable.** Lou Paget, author of *The Great Lover Playbook* (Gotham Books, 2005), says that physical contact is the best way to say, "I want you." That means deep kisses instead of just light pecks, and real hugs rather than shoulder grazes. Paget says that women especially need to be aware of this. "Men are so used to having to approach women, that when a woman goes to him it sends a powerful message -- namely, I feel safe in your space, I like your body, I want to do something with your body," she says.
- 3. We will be marriage-centered, not child-centered.** Many parents believe that the best way to care for their children is to put them before their marriage. Atwood says this isn't true. "The most powerful gift you can give your children is a strong, loving marriage," says Atwood. That's why it's important to have some regular kid-free time with your mate. Christine, 37, from Winnetka, Illinois, likes to tag along on business trips with her husband, Dave, so they can some enjoy some alone time in the evening. They also like to have lunch with each other on national holidays, when Dave is off. "This is one of our favorite things to do. We get a sitter and head into the city for a long lunch and walking down Michigan Avenue," says Christine.
- 4. We will create an exciting vision for our future.** "Most couples just drift through each year, caught up in the day-to-day grind, never stopping to ask, 'What do we want out of our life together?'" says Atwood. But nothing bonds a couple like creating a common vision of your life together. "That's what cements a true partnership," she says. For example, instead of seeing a financial planning as a chore, talk to your mate about your goals for your savings. Buying your dream home? Moving to Aruba? Opening a bed and breakfast? Planning and dreaming with your mate will create a solid bond.
- 5. We will not let ourselves go.** Yes, time takes its toll. Stress, childbirth, and the aging process are bound to leave their mark, but that doesn't mean it's time to put on sweatpants and surrender to the forces of nature. Leslie, 38, from Lawrence, Kansas, says that looking good for her husband is actually more important to her now than it was when they were first dating. "When you're young, you can take for granted that you look good. Plus, I want part of me to be the same person I was physically when we met. I don't want to chop off my hair and do the 'mom' jeans," says Leslie. Paget says this is essential. "Pay attention to yourself the way you did when you were single. Take three minutes and curl your eyelashes and put on lip gloss. Wear things that are sexy, and not those nasty leggings and T-shirt. That is frumpazoid deluxe," says Paget.
- 6. We will talk about sex outside the bedroom.** Paget says that many people would like to talk about sex with their partner -- trying something new, letting their mate know what they like -- but don't know how to start the conversation. The key, says Paget, is to have the conversation at a neutral time, like when you're cooking

dinner. "It's less confrontational, and if you ease into it in the light of day there's time to let it simmer. You can say, 'I heard about bleep and I'd love to try that with you,'" says Paget.

7. **We will continually say "I love you," with both words and actions.** When Paul gave his wife Mary a gift certificate for a day of beauty at a local spa, he was stunned by the reaction. "She was absolutely thrilled. I couldn't believe it. It's a complete mystery to men why women like stuff like that. Same thing with flowers. You give a woman flowers and she flips. I don't get it," says Paul, 41, from Brooklyn, New York. But Paul knows that he doesn't need to understand why Mary likes spas. He sees that they make her happy, so he's resolved to give her a new spa gift certificate every six months. Atwood says that gestures like this go a long way. "The small, positive things that you do each day fill the emotional bank account so that you can handle the moments of stress or upset," she says.
8. **We will banish the TV from the bedroom.** Television is a huge intimacy-killer, says Paget. "Unless you want three people in the bedroom, turn it off. If you're in bed with another person called the TV, you won't give attention to your partner," she says. Make your bedroom a place to relax and be intimate with your spouse, not for *Seinfeld* reruns.
9. **We will toss out the scorecard.** New Year's is a great time for a clean slate. If the two of you are keeping tabs on who has racked up more brownie points or demerits, now's the time for a fresh start. "You're both human and prone to error. Instead of focusing on what you do wrong, focus on what's right and let go of the little mistakes," says Atwood. Bring yourself back to the days when you did something nice for your spouse -- cooking their favorite meal, cleaning their car -- simply because you loved them, without regard for who has (or doesn't have) more points.
10. **We will create our own resolutions together.** A list like this might be a helpful starting point, but the best way to create romantic resolutions that will stick is to sit down with your partner and create some that are meaningful to you both. "Stay focused on self-direction and personal growth and away from finger-pointing. The behavior of love is what counts, so be specific about your actions," says Atwood. Taking time to connect with your partner now will help bring you good lovin' all year long.