

**'Love cures people – both the ones who give and the ones who receive'**

**– Carl Menninger –**

**1 Identify similarities and differences:**

Accepting that our partners are different from ourselves is very important. Take a large piece of paper and on one half make a list of all the ways that you and your partner are alike, and on the other half make a list of all the ways you are different. This includes interests, attitudes, skills, likes, dislikes, personality and general outlook. Do the exercise separately and then get together and show each other your lists. Discuss the aspects in which you are alike and different. Go through the list of differences and identify differences that you are happy with and would like to continue, and those that you find hard to accept and would like the other person to change.

**2 Let's make a contract:** Each partner draws up a list of the specific 'behaviours' that they would like their partner to increase, or do more of, and the specific behaviours they would like their partner to decrease or do less of. Then both partners agree to exchange a behaviour, of equal difficulty, and agree to make a contract. For example, 'I will put the top on the toothpaste everyday and you will put the toilet seat down'. It is best to start on small discrete tasks that are relatively easy to achieve and gradually work up to more difficult tasks.

**3 Rediscover spontaneity:** After a while, couples get to know each other inside out, and routines become predictable. Make a deliberate effort to do things differently, breaking old familiar habits. For example sleep on the other side of the bed, dress differently, sit in a different chair to watch television, get up very early, tell a joke, miss a meal. Make a game out of guessing what the spontaneous thing was.

**4 Make a date:** Coordinate your diaries and make a deliberate effort to spend some special time alone together each week. Perhaps having a leisurely meal together, or sitting and talking over a drink, or going out to see a show.

**5 Do you get the appreciation you deserve?**

Relationships can suffer when people do not feel appreciated, or when signs of appreciation, however small, are not forthcoming. These small signs of appreciation are often referred to as 'strokes'. For a relationship to flourish each person needs to give their partner appropriate 'strokes'. List all the things that you do, at home or at work, for which you think you deserve strokes. Then go through the list and place a '+' next to items where you feel you get sufficient strokes, a '-' next to the items where you feel you do not get sufficient strokes, and a '=' sign next to items where the balance is just about right. Both do this separately and then exchange and discuss lists.

**6 Do it for me:** Make an agreement to take it in turns, to ask your partner to do something for you that you would like. It does not have to be anything spectacular, but rather something simple, and something that your partner would be able to do without feeling uncomfortable. Tasks might include watching a particular television programme together, cooking the evening meal, washing your hair for you, giving a massage, or going for a walk.