

happen because love doesn't come with instructions

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QUICK POLL



Single parents—how do you date during summer vacation?

- No differently than I do during the school year
- My kids are at camp or with their other parent
- I plan dates that involve my kids, too

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Want to get closer to that special someone you're dating? Here are some offbeat but effective ideas to try.

By Margot Carmichael Lester

Sure, you can buy some sexy lingerie or a bottle of nice champagne to rev up your love life with that person who's giving you butterflies. Or you could mix it up a little and try something new. Something different. Something utterly unexpected. Introducing some variety into your relationship could kick up the romance in very exciting ways.

Here are some innovative ideas to consider:

1. Engage in some petting

No, not that kind! "Pets can be an important stabilizer in love relationships," says Terri Orbuch, the Detroit-based "Love Doctor." In fact, a study from SUNY Buffalo found that pet-owning daters have closer relationships, bounce back more quickly after stressful arguments and are more satisfied than those who don't own pets. "The unconditional love of pets rubs off on couples," she says.

Cooking together can be a terrific communal experience.

2. Heat it up

Cooking together is a feast for all your senses says Marnie Carmichael, founder of Spring Valley, OH-based bakery/confectionary Nonnie Waller's Traditional Southern. "The kitchen, not the bedroom, is the most important room in the house to build and grow a wonderful relationship," she says. "With pots boiling and knives chopping, cooking together is a deeply shared and communal experience. The bumping into each other and tripping over each other, trying to get to a pot before it spills over—that's all part of the fun."

3. Do something good

"My boyfriend and I really enjoy doing volunteer work together," says Suzy Walton of Miami. "It always feels good to help others, and doing it with someone special increases that good feeling. It's also a break from the usual dinner-and-a-movie routine."

4. Break out the hula hoop

Swaying hips are always alluring, and San Francisco-based Christabel Zamor (a self-proclaimed "Hoop Star") suggests kicking it up a notch by hula-hooping with your date. "Your bodies become warm and energized and your senses become awakened," she says. "Before [hooping], I was feeling uptight, guarded and uninterested in my own sensuality.

Reading to each other is a nice way to really listen to each other.

Hoop dance has transformed my entire being and skyrocketed my sex life!" Plus, it's a good cardiovascular workout. Two birds, one stone...

5. Go stag

Improve your togetherness by being apart? It's what Irvine, CA-based psychologist and sex therapist Stephanie Buehler suggests. "Spending time apart allows desire to stir, creates a bit of mystery, and makes you more interesting," she asserts. "If you spend all your time together, where is the chance for longing to grow? It doesn't have to be a week-long vacation, but a day or a weekend can create the essential space needed. Remember, fire needs oxygen in order to burn, so if you don't have a gap, there can be no place for the spark to catch."

6. Relate while you meditate

"It may sound crazy, but I like to meditate with the person I'm seeing," admits Will Goushee of Fort Collins, CO. "Spending quiet, contemplative time with each other brings a shared tranquility and a stronger bond."

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Free from happen

7. Hit the books

"My boyfriend and I take turns reading to each other at night," says Marcie Camp of New Haven, CT. "It's a nice way to end the day, to be close and to really listen to each other. We also have fun going to the used book store to pick out the book we'll read."

Taking a new tack toward improving your togetherness gives you a chance to forge a stronger bond with each other and to increase your spiritual, emotional and physical closeness. Who wouldn't want that? So get busy and try one (or more) of these ideas tomorrow.

North Carolina-based freelance journalist Margot Carmichael Lester was surprised at how co-authoring the book, Be A Better Writer, revved up her relationship with her husband.

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