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ARTICLE • WOMEN & MIDLIFE

5 Long-Term Couples Share Their Intimacy Secrets

By Lambeth Hochwald

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No one ever said it's easy to keep the magic alive when you're in a long relationship, but there are plenty of couples who've found fail-safe formulas to staying intimate with each other, both emotionally and physically, through the years.

Meet five couples who've been in relationships for years who are making it work and loving each other deeply in the process. They've learned a lot about staying close—and their stories just might give you some ideas on how to keep the fire alive in your own relationship.

7 Years Together: It's All About Communication

Ask Holly Soriano and she'll gladly share her secret to a strong relationship: "Love is a commitment that is much stronger than an emotion," says the 49-year-old filmmaker who lives in Los Angeles. "It's also about putting things in perspective."

In practice, this means always doing your best to communicate kindly with your partner, especially when your relationship inevitably endures some bumps in the road, something Holly and her husband, Richard, have most definitely experienced.

"We've been through grad school, five years of trying to get pregnant, making a movie together, and each of us working two jobs at the same time," she says.

This shared history gives the couple a perspective that guides them when times get tough.

"We ask ourselves, 'Does this one moment of anger matter more than our number of years together, being silly together, and talking with each other instead of *at* each other?' she says. "It helps us to ask this question of each other and ourselves."

11 Years Together: A Surprisingly Fun Way to Keep Things Fresh

It may have surprised them both initially, but Kira Gurnée and her husband, Michael, who split their time between California and New Zealand, have found that a sexy dance can get help them feel intimately connected. Kira performs a private burlesque "show" for him—sometimes, right at home, but also when they're apart.

"I can dance for him via videochat and this definitely takes phone sex to the next level," says Kira, a voice-over artist in her 40s.

"He loves for me to perform for him and it makes me feel sexy," she adds. "Best of all, this helps us keep that spark burning when we're apart, and even when we're together after this many years of marriage."

23 Years Together: Sticking with 3 Guiding Principles

Damon Nailer, 45, is clear about the three ingredients that make his marriage of 20-plus years work: communication, flexibility, and unselfishness.

"Each person must be comfortable with articulating his or her needs and desires regarding intimacy," says Damon, a life coach who lives in Monroe, Louisiana. "Once those needs and desires are expressed, the other partner must make a sincere attempt to meet them," he adds.

"For example, what my wife, Necole, and I each wanted in our 20s is different from what we longed for in our 30s. And what satisfies us in our 40s is not the same as those things that pleased us in our 20s and 30s," he says. "As a result, we must be flexible enough to make those changes."

For Damon, sharing what he needs from Necole has made all the difference. He's told her daily cuddling sessions are important to him, and she's expressed that she likes to have plenty of hugs throughout the day, too. The couple has gone so far as to agree to give each other full body massages at least once per month.

"Being clear about these things really helped us stay connected," Damon says.

28 Years Together: It's the Little Things

After almost three decades together, Leigh Anne O'Connor, 55, has come to the realization that it's the small moments that are the biggest key to staying close to her husband, Rob.

"Touching, holding hands, gentle head scratches and feet touching under the table," says Leigh Anne, a lactation consultant in New York City. "These little things go a long way as does dating—really going on dates with each other."

Laughter helps, too.

"Nobody can make me laugh the way my husband makes me laugh," she says. "And, when things get too serious, laughter lightens the mood. We've been keeping each other laughing for all of our years together."

30 Years Together: Be a Grown-Up

One way to forge a long-lasting relationship is to act maturely and face your issues head on, suggests Debra Lee May, 58, a Wisconsin-based life coach, who's been married to her husband, Don, for 30 years.

"Find the best way and time to communicate with each other and be careful about how long you keep unresolved issues to yourself," she says. "In addition, it's always best to share how a situation makes you feel rather than accusing your partner of doing something wrong."

Ultimately, to stay close to one another, aim to be the best person you can be, Debra Lee says.

“Don’t make another person responsible for your happiness,” she says. “When you give each other room, patience, and practice a lot of forgiveness along the way, your relationship will last through the changes that life will bring.”

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