

## **GETTING YOUR HEAD READY FOR ROMANTIC LOVE**

As Valentine's Day approaches, we've got love on our minds and it's natural to think about how to improve our love lives. Here are 3 important tips to get your head (and heart) in the right place to love and be loved – whether you are in a romantic relationship right now or looking for true love.

1. *Keep romance in perspective:* We all want romance, and love can be a very important and wonderful part of life. But it's not your whole life. There are many other areas that are also important including career, family, friendships, health, hobbies, and your personal development.
  - Why is this important? Because love is such an important part of life, sometimes we fall into the trap of letting the search for romance take over our lives, depending on it to satisfy all our needs, even neglecting other areas of our lives. It's too much pressure on a potential partner, and it can cause problems in the unattended parts of life. So even if finding love is a priority, keep it in perspective.
  - How do I do that? By recognizing the natural tendency to ignore the rest of our lives when we're seeking love and remaining aware of this, we can take steps to nip it in the bud. Simply scheduling time for non-relationship related activities like spending time with friends or leaving yourself a reminder to take care of business can be helpful. Perspective is built on a foundation of awareness and what we tell ourselves.
  - *The bottom line: Romance is a piece of the pie, not the whole pie.*
2. *Make yourself happy:* Don't wait for a relationship to make you happy, make yourself happy. Identify what makes you feel alive and go out and do that. Recognize your values, talents, and strengths, and use them regularly in your life.
  - Why is this important? If you don't do this, and seek out a relationship believing that your romantic partner should "make" you happy, you are likely to attract needy people who will not meet your needs. If in order to find a romantic partner, you deny or ignore the qualities within yourself that hold the key to true happiness, you will probably wind up feeling unhappy or empty. On the other hand, when you are happy within yourself, you will be much more attractive to potential romantic partners who've got their own acts together. You will attract people who appreciate your strengths and values and who will make you feel even more alive and vibrant. When you know how to make yourself happy, you can look for a relationship that enriches the happiness that's within you.

- How do I do it? This one takes a bit of a leap of faith. Begin by acknowledging that you hold the key to your own happiness. Stop trying so hard to find a relationship or pressuring your partner to make you happy; focus on what interests you, what you enjoy, and what makes you feel good, and start doing those things as much as possible. Cultivate pleasure, creativity, spirituality, and treat yourself affectionately. Remember, the worst case scenario if you follow this tip is that you will be happy even if you don't find a partner right away.
  - *The bottom line: Remember that a strong and satisfying relationship should be icing on the cake; your full and happy life is the cake.*
3. *Strengthen your capacity to love and be loved:* Cultivate gratitude, and appreciation in your everyday life.
- Why is this important? Positive emotions like these are highly associated with important benefits like better health and stronger performance. But in terms of love and romance, becoming accustomed to experiencing gratitude and appreciation helps you build your own capacity to give and receive love (much like building a muscle) so that you will be well equipped to engage in a true loving relationship. This also helps you strengthen the connection between your head and your heart. Too many people just listen to their head or their heart, when there is much to be gained by being able to tune in to both.
  - How do I do this? This is easy. You can experience gratitude and appreciation whether you're in a romantic relationship or not. There is always something to feel grateful for and there is always something or someone to appreciate in life. Try reflecting on gratitude each night before bed, and on appreciation each morning when you rise. You will in time experience noticeable benefits. There are also biofeedback methods that help strengthen the connection between head and heart and build the capacity to experience love while learning to manage stress.
  - *The bottom line: Cultivating your capacity to love and be loved by practicing gratitude and appreciation in daily life is like cultivating the earth to nurture a beautiful garden.*

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