

YOUR MARRIAGE ALIVE DATING PLAN

Write in when you are going to have each date.

Date One, Choosing a High-Priority Marriage,
is scheduled for _____

Date Two, Learning to Talk,
is scheduled for _____

Date Three, Resolving Honest Conflict,
is scheduled for _____

Date Four, Becoming an Encourager,
is scheduled for _____

Date Five, Finding Unity in Diversity,
is scheduled for _____

Date Six, Building a Creative Love Life,
is scheduled for _____

Date Seven, Sharing Responsibility and Working Together,
is scheduled for _____

Date Eight, Balancing Your Dual Role As Partner and Parent,
is scheduled for _____

Date Nine, Developing Spiritual Intimacy,
is scheduled for _____

Date Ten, Having an Intentional Marriage,
is scheduled for _____

YOUR DATING GROUND RULES

Before you date, please read this.

To get the most out of each date we make the following suggestions:

- *Read the corresponding chapter and/or the chapter summary.* If you have not filled out the exercise, do so before you begin your discussion.
- *Stay positive!* All of us have things we'd like to tell our spouse. This is NOT the time to tell your mate what he or she has done wrong the past ten years.
- *Be future focused.* Focus on what you want your relationship to be like in the future. Don't concentrate on past failure. (It's okay to remember past successes.)
- *Talk about your relationship.* Do not talk about your children, job, mother-in-law, or other things outside your relationship.
- *Give a gift of love.* Some dates will interest you more than others. On the less exciting ones, give a gift of love: Participate enthusiastically!
- *Don't force it.* If you have difficulty on a particular date or get on a negative track, stop that discussion. Move on to another topic that you both feel good about. Do something that is fun, like bowling, tennis, taking a walk, or eating cake.
- *Use good communication skills.* Be prepared for some surprises and new insights about your spouse. They can open new opportunities for growth and intimacy in your marriage. Following are several tips for sharing your answers:
 1. Be honest, yet never unkind.
 2. Remember to start your sentences with "I" and let them reflect back on you.
 3. Resist attacking the other or defending yourself.
 4. Use the feelings formula when you are able.
 5. Be specific and positive.
- *Have fun!* Remember why you are dating your mate. It is to enrich and put new life into your marriage. It's simply imperative to have fun along the way!
- *After each date, take the post-date application tips seriously!* Remember, you are developing healthy habits that will enrich your marriage long after your Marriage Alive 10 Great Dates have been completed.

DATE ONE EXERCISE

PART 1—A Trip Down Memory Lane

First time I saw my mate: _____

First date: _____

First kiss: _____

Favorite dates: _____

First time we talked about getting married: _____

Wedding day: _____

First home: _____

First anniversary: _____

Most romantic moments: _____

Happiest memories: _____

PART 2—What’s Great About Us!

1. What are three things that are positive about our marriage relationship?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

2. What are two things that are fine about our relationship but could be better?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

3. What is one thing I personally could do to make our relationship better?

- 1. _____

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Look for ways to compliment each other between now and the next date. Give at least one honest compliment each day.
- Do one thing to make your marriage better.

DATE TWO EXERCISE

Sharing Our True Feelings

1. What are our favorite topics to talk about? (Things about which we usually agree and promote good interaction)

2. What are our less favorite topics? (Things we tend to debate about)

3. Make a list of “feelings” words that you would feel comfortable using with each other.

4. Take turns answering the following questions:
How do I feel when:
 - You give me a compliment?

 - You express appreciation for something I did?

 - You smile at me?

 - You make a sacrifice for me?

 - You reach out and touch me?

 - You tell me you love me?

 - You tell me you are proud of me?

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Keep looking for ways to compliment each other between now and the next date.
- Try to identify when you get into the confrontive pattern of communication and stop before it escalates.
- See how often you can use the companionate pattern.
- Practice using feelings words to better reveal yourself to your spouse.

DATE THREE EXERCISE

PART 1—You and Your Friends at the Zoo

Before your date, rate yourself. Then on your date compare your lists and rankings. Then remember, you don't have to live in the zoo!

1. Which animal character do you identify with the most in handling conflict?

Rank from the most often used (1) to least often used (5).

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| ___ Turtle—The Withdrawer | ___ Chameleon—The Yielder |
| ___ Skunk—The Fighter | ___ Owl—The Intellectualizer |
| ___ Gorilla—The Winner | |

To avoid imitating our animal friends, we agree to sign the following anger contract:

Our Anger Contract:

1. We agree to tell each other when we are getting angry.
2. We agree not to vent our anger at each other.
3. We will ask for the other's help in solving whatever is causing the anger.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

PART 2—Identifying Issues

From Date Two, under "less favorite topics" (the ones you tend to debate), which were the least emotional? List them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Compare your list of issues with your mate's list. Together choose one area (preferably the one that is the least emotional) that you think would be easier to resolve than some of the other more emotional ones. Remember to use the feelings formula as you discuss this topic using the companionate pattern of communication.

NOTE: If you get into a negative pattern and have difficulty at this point, skip to part 4. Later you can choose a time to repeat part 2 and tackle part 3.

PART 3—Resolving an Issue

From part 2, write out the chosen issue:

The issue we wish to resolve is: _____

Concisely write out how YOU feel about this issue: _____

Exchange exercises and affirm that you really understand how your mate feels. Then you are ready to begin the resolution process. Remember the three C's: Compromise, Capitulation, and Coexistence.

Work through the following four steps:

Step One: Define the problem.

Step Two: Identify who has the need. (which of you feels the great need for a solution and the other person's contribution to the problem).

Step Three: Suggest alternate solutions.

Step Four: Select a plan of action.

PART 4—Having Some Fun!

Enough work for one date! After all, dating is supposed to be fun. Stop on your way home at your favorite ice-cream or yogurt shop and get your favorite dessert! You earned it! Celebrate progress you have made in being able to talk about touchy subjects. And if during the evening, you discovered some really touchy subjects, don't touch them. Instead affirm each other that you are in the process of developing a communication system that really works and you're learning how to process anger in a healthy way.

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Keep looking for ways to express your feelings without attacking each other or defending yourself.
- See how quickly you can identify when you get into the confrontive pattern of communication, and how fast you can move to the companionate pattern.
- Practice using feelings words to better reveal yourself to your spouse.
- When issues arise, be sure you fully understand each other's feelings before you attempt to find a solution!

DATE FOUR EXERCISE

Becoming an Encourager

To help you develop the habit of encouraging your mate, concentrate on the ways you can sincerely compliment your spouse. Answer the following questions:

1. How has your spouse encouraged you in the past?
2. How would you like your spouse to encourage you in the future?
3. In what areas do you feel most competent?
4. Is there an area that you would like to explore? (Sports, crafts, writing, gourmet cooking, hobbies, education, etc.)
5. What can you do to encourage your spouse to take a risk or try something new?

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Concentrate, for at least one day, on making sure that your positive statements to your spouse outweigh the negative ones by at least five to one.
- Be gracious and appreciative when your spouse compliments you. And avoid saying, “Oh, you had to do that—it’s our assignment!”
- Look for humor!

DATE FIVE EXERCISE

Balancing Your Strengths and Weaknesses

How are you balancing your marriage in the following areas? In looking at each continuum discuss the following questions:

1. If we are alike, how can we compensate?
2. If we are opposite, how can we balance each other?



Feelings

Facts



Private

Public



Spontaneous

Planner



Active and Assertive

Laid-Back and Calm



Night Owl

Day Lark



Time-Oriented

Not Time-Oriented

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Look for ways you are different that complement each other.
- In ways that you are alike, look for ways you can compensate!
- If little irritations arise from your differences, privately go through the steps for dealing with your own inappropriate responses (pages 77-78).

DATE SIX EXERCISE

PART 1—Taking the Sexual Attitude Test*

Check the following statements that apply to you. Give yourself one point for each statement checked.

- I enjoy my sexual relationship with my spouse.
- I think he/she enjoys it too.
- I look forward to the next time of physical intimacy.
- My mate tells me that he/she is satisfied with our sex life.
- I'm satisfied with our sex life.
- I initiate lovemaking from time to time.
- I plan times for us to be alone together.
- We have had an overnight getaway (alone) in the past six months.
- I often tell my spouse that I desire him/her.
- My spouse would describe me as a tender lover.
- I'm willing to work on areas in our sexual relationship that need improvement.

SCORING: If you checked seven or more of these statements, you most likely have a reasonably good sexual relationship. If your score was lower than seven, don't be discouraged. A candid self-appraisal and an effort to modify your attitude can result in a change in your score in a very short time!

Note: On this test you can miss checking one of the statements and still be a "ten."

*The original idea of this SAT came from our friend Kathy Clarke who is a mother, grandmother, and creative lover to her husband, Bill.

PART 2—Planning an Ultimate Getaway

Plan your own ultimate getaway by answering the following questions:

1. Where would we like to go? Make a list of possible places, then together choose one.
2. When can we go? Write down possible dates for your getaway. Choose one and write it down in your calendar. (You may also want to choose an alternate date.)
3. What are our resources for our getaway? Decide if this will be an economy getaway or the big splurge. Work out a budget and designate funds.
4. What arrangements do we need to make? List things like child care, pet care, reservations, getting directions and maps, preparing food and snacks to take, etc.
5. What should we take with us? Make a packing list of things you want to take along like CD player and your favorite romantic CDs, candles (don't forget matches), snacks, and no work!
6. What are some of the things we would like to do and perhaps talk about during our weekend? Make an appropriate list.

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Look for ways to make your marriage a love affair.
- Follow up on your initial plans for a getaway. Even twenty-four hours can make a big difference!
- Set guidelines for your getaway:
 1. We will stay positive.
 2. We won't talk about our children or work.
 3. We will leave work and worries at home.
 4. We will have fun!

DATE SEVEN EXERCISE

PART 1—Assessing and Balancing Your Responsibilities

1. Assess your present responsibilities:

List your responsibilities outside the home:

Husband

Wife

List your responsibilities inside the home:

Husband

Wife

2. Consider how you can balance home responsibilities:

List all household jobs and responsibilities such as preparing meals, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, helping the children with homework, caring for the yard:

Husband

Wife

From the list above choose the jobs you prefer to do:

Husband

Wife

Brainstorm solutions for the jobs that are on neither of your lists: (remember the three C's: Compromise, Capitulation, and Coexistence.) Include your children in your planning as well. Choose age-appropriate chores to help lighten your burden. For more help choosing chores for your children, we recommend the book *Children Who Do Too Little* by Patricia Sprinkle (Zondervan).

Our plan is: _____

PART 2—Managing Time Pressures

Answer the following questions to help evaluate how you are dealing with time pressures in your marriage relationship:

1. Do I feel in control of my time?
2. Do I try to avoid overscheduling?
3. Do I set limits on my work?
4. Am I getting enough sleep and eating a balanced diet?
5. Am I punctual when meeting my spouse?
6. Do I watch more than one hour of television each day?
7. Do I have time for friends and family?
8. Do I have any leisure time?
9. Do I spend enough time with my children?
10. Do I have any private time for reflection and meditation?

Talk through your lists and discuss what changes you need to make and which ones are realistic.

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Monitor your new plans for working together.
- Compliment your spouse when he or she accomplishes a new task.
- You might want to choose a question each day from part 2, the exercise on managing time pressures, and talk about how you are doing.
- Have the mind-set that you are going to work together. It can make a big difference in your attitude and outlook on life!

DATE EIGHT EXERCISE

PART 1—How Our Children Enrich Our Marriage

Discuss the following statements and list ways each is true in your marriage.

1. Children remind us that we're one.
2. Children foster teamwork.
3. Children promote appreciation.
4. Children promote creativity.
5. Children check our communication and keep us honest.
6. Children prevent boredom.
7. Children give great rewards.

PART 2—How Our Marriage Enriches Our Children

Discuss the following statements and list ways each is true in your marriage.

1. We provide security, love, and a sense of belonging.
2. We model healthy relationships.
3. We give guidance and leadership.
4. We teach life skills.
5. We pass on traditions and values.

PART 3—Family Planning

(for couples considering having a family)

Discuss the following questions:

1. How many children would I like to have?
2. What would be the ideal spacing of children?
3. What are my favorite names? How do I feel about family names?
4. How do I feel about child care?
5. How can we still find time for two?
6. What is my concept of “coparenting”?

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Look for the positive ways your children impact your marriage.
- Look for the positive ways your marriage impacts your children.

DATE NINE EXERCISE

Developing Spiritual Intimacy

Discuss the following questions:

1. Individually and as a couple, where are you on your spiritual pilgrimage?
2. What are your basic core beliefs?
3. In what ways do you live out spiritual intimacy?
4. What could you do to serve others?

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Together write a list of your shared core beliefs.
- Pick one book on a topic related to spiritual growth and commit to read it together in the coming year.

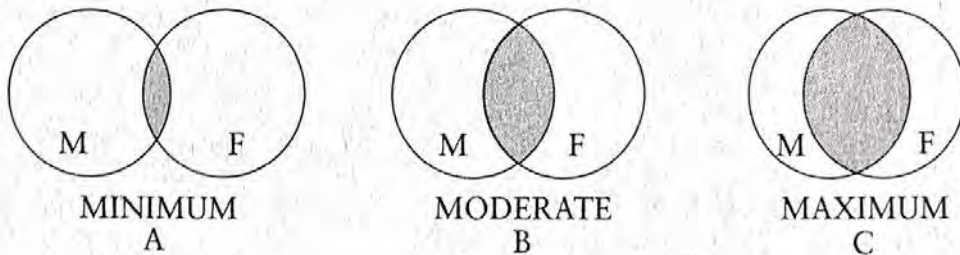
DATE TEN EXERCISE

PART 1—Expectation Survey*

What are your expectations? Why did you get married? What is most important to you and your mate? Let's look at seven areas of expectations in marriage. Rank them in order of their importance to you (1 for very important; 7 for unimportant). Then go back through the list and rank them according to their importance to your spouse.

- ___ ___ 1. **Security**—The knowledge of permanence in the relationship and of financial and material well-being.
- ___ ___ 2. **Companionship**—Having a friend who goes through all the joys and sorrows of life with you, a soul partner; having common areas of interest.
- ___ ___ 3. **Sex**—The oneness that comes through physical intimacy in marriage; the initiation and enjoyment of a growing love relationship.
- ___ ___ 4. **Understanding and tenderness**—Experiencing regularly the touch, the kiss, the winks across the room that say, "I love you," "I care," "I'm thinking of you."
- ___ ___ 5. **Encouragement**—Having someone verbally support and appreciate your work and efforts in your profession, in your home, with the children, and so on.
- ___ ___ 6. **Intellectual closeness**—Discussing and growing together in common areas of intellectual thought.
- ___ ___ 7. **Mutual activity**—Doing things together—politics, sports, church work, hobbies.

PART 2—Degrees of Involvement in Marriage



*Expectation Survey was adapted from: Mary Susan Miller, "What are Your Expectations from Marriage?" *Family Life Today* (October 1980), 19.

1. Where would you place your marriage—A, B, or C?
2. Which degree of involvement would you like to have in your marriage?
3. What is realistic for you at this stage of your marriage?

PART 3—Setting Realistic Goals

To set realistic goals for your marriage, consider the following three questions:

1. In Part 1 of this exercise, how far apart are your expectations? Have you identified some expectations that you'd like to meet?
2. In Part 2 of this exercise, how involved do you want to be with each other? What style of marriage do you want?
3. How can you devise a plan of action to get where you want to be? List possible goals:

Answer three questions:

1. WHAT? (choose one goal)
2. HOW? (things you will do to help accomplish your goal)
3. WHEN? (write in your calendar!)

POST-DATE APPLICATION

- Follow your new intentional marriage plan.
- Keep an intentional marriage journal and monitor your progress. For instance, “Today we got up ten minutes early for our couple-sharing time. It was so meaningful, we plan to repeat it tomorrow!”
- Keep looking for the positive and complimenting each other. (By now, this should be a habit.)
- Continue your habit of dating. Some couples agree to go back through these ten dates at least once a year.
- Together make a list of future dates you would like to have. An alive marriage will remain alive and healthy as you nurture it.