

Unique Valentine treats

By Steven Hendlin, Ph.D.

As we once again approach Valentine's Day, let us pause for a minute to look at how we can best use this happy occasion to enrich our most intimate love relationships. The hectic pace of our lives makes it easy to dispense with Valentine's Day with a cute card and a box of candy or bouquet of roses. Or to dismiss the day altogether as just another commercial gain for Hallmark and the candy industry.

While a card and gifts are the traditional way for many to say "You are my Valentine," this occasion can be used in a more conscious and powerful way to communicate to our loved one how we feel. Don't let cards or gifts act as substitutes for putting your feelings into words. Don't be afraid to say, "I love you" loud and clear. It's too easy to let the prefabricated sentiments of a card do your talking for you. Say it out of your own mouth—and then say it again. This is especially important for longer-term marriages and committed couples, where the significance of these words is all too easily glossed over. Feel the words in your heart while you say them so that you may connect more deeply than usual.

One way to nourish a love relationship on Valentine's Day is to plan a special dinner or outing where the focus is just on the two of you, without any interruption from kids or work projects. Consider using this special time to reaffirm your vows to each other, or to create new vows for the rest of the year.

Do tell your partner what makes him or her special to you. You can't be too mushy on Valentine's Day.

If you happen to be carrying any resentment toward your partner into this day, consider letting it go. Consciously tell yourself that this day is for opening your heart and releasing any hard feelings that may have created distance from your loved one. If you are unable to give up your resentment, it may be necessary to discuss with your partner the need to get professional help to resolve your differences.

No matter whether the problems lie in the areas of communication, sexual incompatibility, money matters, dealing with the kids or leisure time civilities, don't be afraid to confront these problems directly. Valentines' Day is a good opportunity to honestly and lovingly reflect on where your relationship is and where it is going

If you are single and not dating or involved in a relationship, use this day to be especially kind and loving to yourself. Resist the temptation to feel left out or depressed just because you are alone and not with a partner. Remember that "loved ones" means children, friends and family — not just romantic partners. My mother used to send me a Valentine Day's card every year once I left home.

Enjoy this happy day and remember the meaning of love, commitment and the playful side of life. Catch that glimpse of love shining from your partner's eyes and let it soak in longer than usual.