

Happy February! February is a busy month for us this year! First, there's a football game 2/11/24- have you heard about it? Our own KC Chiefs are going to Las Vegas to play to play in the Super Bowl against another team with the same colors! Go Chiefs! BUT that's not all that's going on. VALENTINES DAY, 2/14/24, is also the beginning of LENT. That's right, friends! ASH WEDNESDAY is 2/14/24 and we will be beginning our Lenten journey towards the Cross and Easter, which is 3/31/24. What have you decided to give up or add for the season of preparedness and self-sacrifice? If you haven't decided yet, why not work on building a better relationship with your partner or spouse? Or with you kids? Look at these tips from the New York Times for 2024:

1. Give people permission to change.

It can be challenging to recognize that people you have known for years, like siblings, have evolved and may be entirely different than they once were. But doing so can help you maintain genuine closeness over time. Periodically, consider asking questions that get at who your loved one has become. Whitney Goodman, a licensed marriage and family therapist based in Miami, recommends prompts such as “What are you into now?” or “What is going on in your life that I don't know about?”

2. When the phone rings, pick up.

Loneliness is a public health crisis that affects more than half of Americans, but Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, the surgeon general, believes that some strategies for finding and maintaining connection are startlingly simple. For instance, when someone calls you, pick up the phone, he says, even if it's just to say “hi” and find another time for a longer catch-up. “That 10 seconds feels so much better than going back and forth on text,” Dr. Murthy said.

3. Beware of ‘phubbing.’

Glancing at your phone when someone is talking to you, or reaching for it whenever the conversation stalls, can lead to feelings of hurt and frustration. Recent research suggests that the practice — a combination of “phone” and “snubbing” — can be particularly damaging to romantic partnerships. Experts say simple tweaks, like limiting digital alerts and establishing clear ground rules with your partner around phone use, can help.

“I know this doesn’t sound sexy, and people don’t want to do this in their relationships, but truly it’s the No. 1 strategy,” said Katherine Hertlein, a professor in the couple and family therapy program at the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

4. When arguing, avoid generalizations.

Phrases like “you always ...” or “you never ...” are exaggerations, and they make others defensive. “You’re not even having a problem-solving conversation anymore,” said Kier Gaines, a licensed therapist in Washington, D.C. “You’re just going into full-blown argument mode.” Instead, make an effort to focus only on the problem at hand.

5. Never underestimate the power of a compliment.

People may shy away from offering them, because they worry about sounding awkward or coming off as insincere. But compliments are usually much more welcome than we expect, said Erica Boothby, a social psychologist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

When complimenting a stranger, keep it brief and sincere. When complimenting a friend or loved one, be specific — saying not just what you like about someone, for instance, but also expressing how that person makes you feel.

6. When dealing with challenging family members, focus on what you can control.

As much as you might wish to, you cannot change your family members, said Nedra Glover Tawwab, a licensed clinical social worker and author of “Drama Free: A Guide to Managing Unhealthy Family Relationships.” She recommends asking yourself: If this person didn’t change anything about themselves or their behavior, what, if anything, could I do to make the relationship different?

7. Don’t let introversion stand in the way of deep connection.

“Introverts are mistaken for being antisocial,” said Susan Cain, the author of “Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking.” “Actually, they’re differently social.” Introverts tend to have more of an inward or internal orientation, but they still crave friendship and connection as much as anyone.

So, introverts: Lean into your natural preferences and tendencies, experts advise. Seek out comfortable people in comfortable places, and

embrace the power of initiating plans, which gives you control over who you socialize with and where.

8. When someone you love is upset, ask one simple question.

When young students are upset, teachers will sometimes ask: “Do you want to be helped, heard or hugged?” That question can offer adults a sense of comfort and control, too, experts said. That’s because different emotions need different responses, said Dr. Elizabeth Easton, the director of psychotherapy at Pathlight Mood and Anxiety Center in Denver. Reassurance may work well for anxiety, but could infuriate someone who is frustrated, she said. At its core, this simple question is about identifying: How can I meet your needs?

Ultimately, a relationship requires both parties to give some and take some. It’s a “two-way street,” as my grandmother used to say, and a one-sided give only or take only is not a relationship! Remember that LOVE is at the basis of all relationships- we love because God loves us.

Blessings,

Rev. Sarah