



# REAL LIFE LOVE

## **5 Practices to Nurture Your Connection with Your Beloved**



HAI Global  
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# INTRODUCTION



**Are you longing for a deeply fulfilling, truly intimate and trusting relationship that you can count on even in the most difficult times?**

Maybe you've felt disappointed in relationships you've had in the past, and now you're hesitant to fully trust again, fearful of experiencing heartbreak again.

Or maybe you're in a long-term relationship that has had a lot of turmoil, and you find yourself struggling to connect, arguing too often, and you're not even sure why.

Perhaps you're happy in your current relationship, but you find yourself wondering if there couldn't be more – more connection, more sex, more joy.

**We get it!** School doesn't teach us how to have thriving, successful relationships – although it should! Many of us come from split families, or families where conflict and isolation were common. Even if you're one of the lucky ones who had loving parents who communicated well, you may be struggling to create your own healthy, loving relationships as an adult.

**We want you to know that you are definitely not alone and you've come to the right place.**

Here at HAI we've been teaching participants in our workshops the fundamental elements of great relationships for over 50 years. We've explored, experimented and refined our exercises and approaches in order to provide you with time-tested methods for increasing the love in your life. We are experts at helping you to connect deeply, build trust and create a bond that can withstand even the worst of life's challenges.

In this eBook we share with you five practices, distilled from our decades of experience, that you can implement immediately to increase harmony and connection in your romantic relationships. Continue reading to find out more.



Once upon a time two people fell in love. They each felt like they were the lucky one. Colors grew brighter. Tasks became easier. Together they sensed their shared life would be rich, fulfilling, exciting, sensual, purposeful, and filled with love and great sex.

*And for a time it was so...*

Then slowly the newness wore off, the hormones calmed down, and ordinary life brought mundane challenges. While still in love, our couple no longer saw each other through the rose-colored lens of the perfect mate who will solve all longings, disappointments and challenges. Irritation, anxiety, and even resentment reared their heads. Gaps emerged in their closeness, and they found themselves arguing on occasion without even knowing why.

Sometimes people separate when they hit this stage in their relationship, not realizing that this is actually a sign of their **increasing intimacy** rather than a sign that they are no longer suited to one another.

Ironically when intimacy deepens, the part of us that has not felt safe to be seen and heard, and maybe still has unhealed wounds, starts to have expectations and desires. *'Maybe this person will finally love me the way I want to be loved,'* this part imagines. *'Maybe they will understand me and take care of me and make sure I always have what I need.'* This part of ourselves begins to emerge because **love is present**, not because something is wrong.

Yet this part of us is also very young, and is probably not very skilled at expressing its emotions or speaking up for its needs. When two people are seeking to get their important attachment needs met, yet neither of them are able to express their needs or desires in a way that invites connection, a lot can go wrong. "Ouch" is almost guaranteed.

Sound familiar?



## This can show up as thoughts like this:

- If they were paying attention, they would know \_\_\_\_\_ .
- If they really loved me, then they would/ wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_.
- If they really trusted me, they wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Why can't they see that I need \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Why is it so difficult for them to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Why do they need so much space? Don't they love me?
- If they were attracted to me, they would \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Can't they see that I just need love and reassurance?

In other words...

Why doesn't my partner give me what I want and need without me having to ask for it? Shouldn't they just 'get me' at this point?

Why do I feel like I'm not getting what I need from my person, no matter how many times I try?



*The miracle of love is that it is a mirror into our own soul.*

*~Gandhi*

The truth is that this longing happens for most of us! We all have wounded places inside that haven't fully healed and, subconsciously, we desperately want our partner(s) to heal that place for us.

When love opens our hearts and we feel -- oh this really is "the one" -- we begin to lay assumptions, expectations, desires and needs at the foot of our partner, without saying a word.

**Who could ever live up to that? No one.**

Neither you nor your partner are to blame. None of us are. We're sure you're both doing the best that you can, and that your commitment has brought you here.

The good news is that you've been getting smarter and more aware about this, and now you're here seeking support and guidance to nurture your relationship. And that's the first, most vital, step. Congratulations!

We call this eBook *Real Life Love* because we understand that the infatuation stage of love gives way to a power struggle over needs, and this is where real life and real love begins. It's how one meets the challenges of this subconscious tug-of-war that determines the juiciness and lifeblood of the relationship. No matter if you've been together a few months or many years, you *always* have the opportunity to grow by gazing into the mirror of love – because our connection with others can highlight the places in ourselves that need some tender care and attention.

In the following pages you'll discover a series of **insights and practices** that can lead to more joy, a deeper sense of security, more passionate sex, and an aliveness that rivals, but in a healthier, more sustainable way, what you felt when you first fell in love.

One more thing...We invite you to approach each of the following practices with a beginner's mind. Read over each concept and notice the dialog in your head and any emotions that might come up. No judgement, just notice. Often, when we embark on a new segment of our personal growth journey, a part of us resists. It's normal. Take a deep breath and make a decision to proceed with an open mind. Oh, and have *fun!*



# THE 5 PRACTICES

## To Nurture Your Connection with Your Beloved

### **Practice 1: Assume the Other's Goodwill - Page 9**

Begin by assuming that your partner has good intentions.

### **Practice 2: Deep Listening - Page 12**

Be present to another's sharing with no agenda or intention to fix, change, or blame.

### **Practice 3: Validate. Validate. Validate. - Page 15**

Communicate in a way that honors the other person's unique experiences and perspective.

### **Practice 4: Special Dates & Naked Time - Page 18**

Spend time together in new and interesting ways.

### **Practice 5: Remembering the Long Game - Page 25**

Look at the bigger picture and keep the shared vision in mind.





# PRACTICE 1: ASSUME THE OTHER'S GOODWILL

Anytime we are in relationship with another human, there is potential for conflict, disappointment or hurt feelings. This is not a failing of the relationship or the people involved! Sometimes we rub each other the wrong way, and sometimes our unprocessed material gets triggered. Even so, most often no one is trying to harm or hurt anyone.

In healthy, thriving relationships we strive to 'return to love' as soon as we can. One of the most helpful pieces of advice we can offer is: **when you have a negative reaction about something your partner may have said or done, *assume goodwill.***

Assuming goodwill means that you come from the perspective of believing that the other person would never intentionally hurt or harm you. They are not trying to be disrespectful or unloving – no matter how it looks or feels in the moment. Remembering this can help us shift into curiosity.

*“What was happening for my partner that they made this decision or were unable to meet my need in this moment? What was my role in this situation?”*

It can also be a lot easier to step back and look at the bigger picture (more about this in Practice #5) when we assume goodwill. While you may need to have a conversation about what happened, by assuming your partner was not intentionally trying to hurt or harm you, it becomes easier to discuss your feelings without over-interpreting and assuming you know their intentions.

Unhealed places inside us can unconsciously lead us to conflate a current situation with a past one. When this happens, we often project onto our partner the residue from the former hurt. When that happens, we lose perspective and begin to react in an effort to stay safe. This muddies the relationship waters, making it very difficult to actually see and be with your partner in the current moment.

One of the most powerful things you can do when you are in an upset is invoke the power of pause. You can always say, “I need to pause” and take a couple of deep breaths.



You can prepare and teach yourself to be more neutral and present when conflict arises if you take time when you are NOT in conflict to ponder the following questions:

- Do I believe that my partner intends goodwill towards me?
- Do I feel the same goodwill towards my partner?
- What can I do to remember this goodwill when we are experiencing upset?

You might even want to get up and move around or go into another room for a couple of minutes. Let your partner know that you'll be back once you've had some time to cool down. During your break, recall this practice of assuming goodwill and try to open yourself to curiosity.

When you train yourself to assume the goodwill of your partner, and practice goodwill yourself, you can break the unconscious habit you have of seeing your partner as a danger to you, or as the problem to be fixed. As children, we often go right to blame because it feels as if we are protecting ourselves. Ironically, blame separates us from those we love. As an adult, you have the choice to see conflict as the result of two people living autonomous lives and trying to get their own needs met – but the conflict does not define who we are.

When we assume goodwill, we move past the projections and into possibility for re-connection and collaboration towards the shared goal of a shared, happy life.

*Assuming goodwill means that you begin with the perspective that the other person would never intentionally hurt or harm you.*



## **PRACTICE 2: DEEP LISTENING**

Deep listening is a vital skill that will transform your life and the quality of ALL your relationships. It's the best way to quickly deepen intimacy, build strong bonds and show that you care. This practice also requires a lot of awareness, empathy, and the ability to step out of your own shoes into those of another. When practiced with care, it can reduce conflict and increase intimacy.

**Deep Listening arises from your complete attention focused in a loving and receptive way on your partner and their truth.**

When someone is upset, sad, angry, or feeling other strong emotions, usually they simply want to share and be heard. They don't want to be interrupted, be told what to do (no matter how good your advice is), or have you try to fix them or the situation. What they want is for you to *listen* with your full attention. Be receptive. Care. Try and feel in your body what they are feeling in theirs. At the same time, hold this person as a whole person who is fully capable of expressing their feelings and resolving their own issues (even when the issue seems to be your relationship!)



Think about how rare it is for you to receive someone's full attention for as long as you need. Your attention, your deep listening, is a huge gift that you can provide to your partner. This one practice can dramatically transform even a challenged relationship. We all want to be received and to know that we matter. Your full attention transmits that message, *without you having to say a word.*

When someone feels heard, their whole nervous system relaxes, their distress begins to dissipate, and they feel held in the container of your gaze and presence. They come away from the interaction feeling understood and that who they are and what they need matters. So much healing and intimacy can come from this one simple act.

Just remember this is not a conversation. You need to put aside your own reactions, worries, ideas about what they can or should do (in your opinion). You want to step out of your world and into theirs. Also know that *you do not have to agree* with their point of view. In fact at times you may strongly disagree. That's okay. Deep listening does not require agreement. It requires your loving presence. This can be difficult -- and it's so worth it.



## **Deep Listening Process**

Begin by sitting across from each other so you can look into each other's eyes. Depending on how you both feel at the time, you may want to hold hands or have some kind of physical contact.



Start by saying something like: "I can feel how upset you are. What do you need right now? How can I support you? Would you like some advice or do you want me to just listen?"

Now, open your ears and your heart and take in what the other person is saying. Listen not just for the words, but the underlying meaning or feeling they want to convey.

If you find yourself having a reaction to what is being shared, take a deep breath and settle your own reactions. Yes, this can be difficult! Building the capacity to do this will strengthen your relationship and make you a more supportive partner (and friend!)

If your attention wanders, that's okay, just bring your attention back to the other person as soon as you realize you've wandered.

Let go of the need to respond or give advice. **Simply being with the other person and genuinely being present to what they're sharing is enough.** Remember *you do not have to agree* with what they're saying. What is important is that you maintain compassion for the other person, regardless of what they are saying.

Often your devoted presence is sufficient to have the sharer come back to a centered, calmer place. A typical reaction is often something like "oh, that feels better just being able to talk it out, thank you!"

(A hug may be in order.)



## **PRACTICE 3: VALIDATE. VALIDATE. VALIDATE.**

One of the most potent ways of loving someone is to acknowledge the validity of their unique experience, even when, especially when, you don't fully agree with it. They will feel so seen and heard when you let them know that you really 'get' them and that their perspective or experience counts.

Most of the time we assert our point of view into environments in which people are not really listening. Other people have their own ideas, their own agendas, and they want to be heard and understood as much as we do. Yet instead of truly listening to each other with the intention of understanding, we volley back and forth trying to get the other person's attention and agreement.

When we take the first step to listen and then validate another person's point of view -- even when we do not agree -- we throw open the doors to connection and intimacy, which is what we really want anyway, right?

## WAYS TO OFFER VALIDATION

- When your partner expresses something important to them (perhaps with deep emotion), try responding with, “I hear what you’re saying.” You might add (if it is true for you), something like “I love that you are willing to share how you feel about X. It helps me understand you better and feel closer to you.”
- Ask questions designed to sincerely understand your partner’s position or opinion better. Encourage them and then reflect back to them what they said. This is called “active listening” and can feel very validating. All you need to do is say, “I hear you saying that \_\_\_\_\_. Is that right?” and fill in the blank.
- If you do not agree with what your partner is sharing, this could be challenging. Pausing, taking a breath and even owning up to your difficulty can help. Something like, “I’m having a hard time understanding your position...and I want to because I love you...can you tell me more about...?” Open-ended questions work well. Clearly letting your partner know that you want to understand their position better can help alleviate tension and remind you of what’s really important.
- Ask what the other person needs and then offer it to them. You might say, “I’m noticing you seem upset. How can I support you?” They may ask for space, a hug, or for you to listen (see practice #2). When you give someone what they want (rather than what you think they need), you are showing how deeply you care for them. This is validation through action.

- To complete the interaction you might say, “Thanks for sharing your perspective with me so openly. I appreciate it. I know that was vulnerable for you. Your point of view matters to me, and hearing it helps me feel closer to you.”
- You can also learn to ask for validation when you need it. You might say, “I understand that we think (or feel) differently about this subject. Would you be willing to listen to my perspective without trying to convince me to change how I feel?”

**A Reminder:** Simply letting the other person know you’re curious about their perspective will often help them feel validated. Defensiveness is diffused, hearts become connected, and conflict is less likely to occur.

And your tone is, of course, really important. It's actually even more important than what you say. Speak from your heart rather than your mind and you'll do beautifully!

Remember that even when you don't see eye to eye on a subject, you still love each other and that's what matters most when it comes to building intimacy.

## **PRACTICE 4:**

# **SPECIAL DATES & NAKED TIME**

It's no secret that long-term romantic relationships can go from exciting and steamy hot to well...not so hot. We get busy with life - things like school, jobs, kids, health concerns, and running a household. Once the "love hormones" are no longer as active, we need to have more intention about our dating and sexual time together.

### **Special Dates**

Studies have shown that just spending time together isn't enough for most people to be satisfied in a relationship. In fact, research shows that partners who regularly have "exciting" date nights have higher relationship satisfaction.

Think back to when you were dating. Did you enjoy the anticipation build-up that happened when you thought about what might happen on your date? On the day of your date, you may have worn special underwear, or an alluring scent may have been applied strategically...you prepared. For many of us that anticipation is one of the ways a 'date' is more inspiring than something like 'let's grab some dinner tomorrow night'. If that is the case for you or your partner, we have some ideas for you...



The first step is to talk about how you feel about planning dates. If you haven't been in the habit of doing so, you may find it helpful to explore why not and surface any underlying beliefs you or your partner has about setting dates at your stage of relationship. Identifying and addressing these beliefs first will enable you to have fun creating plans together and following through. Otherwise, you may unconsciously undermine your attempts to create special dates.

Once you've gotten clear that you both want to do this, the next step is to explore and clarify both of your preferences and inclinations. What feels right to both of you? How often would you like to plan for? Does one of you love to plan things more than the other? Or are you more spontaneous? Do you both like surprises or do you find pleasure and comfort in familiar venues or activities? What would make a date special? Just having this planning conversation can lead to excitement!

*Simply talking about how you might spend some special time together can create yumminess between the two of you.*



## SOME IDEAS TO SPICE THINGS UP

Enjoy planning your dates together so that both of you feel involved and that your desires matter. Or you could alternate taking turns surprising each other with a new idea.

Once the date is on the calendar, give it at least the same priority you would to a date with a really good friend. If you find yourself wanting to let the “special date” go in favor of something more typical, or letting it go altogether, see if you can make a different choice by considering this special time together sacred.



*You are building a new habit and it may take some commitment and focus to do so.*

You might decide to take a walk together or have a picnic at a local park.

Trade taking each other to a place that has special meaning for you and sharing the memories and meanings with your partner.





Go dancing (or dance in your living room)... go listen to live music... maybe try a type of music that is new to you both.

Try a new restaurant. Perhaps a new cuisine that you've never tried before.

Prepare a special meal together if that isn't something you usually do. Get a little dressed up and set a beautiful table with candles to make it special.



Take a class together (Meetup or Groupon makes this very affordable and accessible).

And, of course, we think that participating in one of HAI's workshops is a great way to light a spark and deepen your connection!





## Sex Dates

Many experts recommend setting aside time specifically to have sex. As we grow older, or if we've been partnered for a while, we also may need to give more attention to turning on our sexual desire than in the past. And in today's high-paced world, it is becoming increasingly important for all couples to carve out "special time." If you've gotten out of the habit of having sex, the mere act of scheduling a date can rekindle the desire again. Of course, you are always at choice for whether or not to have sex once you are in the midst of your date – but we have some ideas that can help ensure a juicy, connected experience regardless of the outcome.

First, preparing your space can help you get in a yummy state of mind. Simple acts done with intention, like lighting a candle, burning incense, putting on some special music, laying out massage supplies or special toys, can help you both get into that special frame of mind. You may find yourself tapping into your creativity even more as time goes on.



## Here are more ideas to get the juices flowing...

- In the days leading up to the date, tell your beloved that you can't wait to see them naked, leave an enticing note in their lunch, or put a rose on the bed.
- How do you define 'sex'? Having this discussion can open up possibilities beyond what is typical for you - have fun!
- In between date nights, build anticipation by remembering past joyful experiences and/or fantasizing together about your next date.
- Speaking of fantasizing... You might consider spinning a fantasy together ahead of your date! Spinning a fantasy together - or taking turns adding to a story - can be illuminating and fun. If sharing your fantasies is new for you, take small steps by sharing one thing you've not shared before and witness how it is received...and build from there!

## Naked Time

In a culture that's often all about sex, we've noticed that many couples crave intimate, even sensual connection, that doesn't necessarily lead to orgasm. You might be surprised at what happens when you carve out time to simply be naked together. For many people "getting naked" means that sex has to follow. Some in our workshops have shared that they've never touched another person skin-to-skin without it leading to sex. The invitation here is to let go of expectations of any particular outcome and simply be naked together. This can be a time for loving touch, stroking each other's faces and bodies, cuddling, and sharing non-verbally as well as verbally.



Scheduling naked time without an expectation of having sexual intercourse can open up your intimacy in new ways. Spending time together naked without expecting *any* particular outcome can relieve the pressure just enough that you can really enjoy each other – possibly in a way you never have before.

Interestingly enough, you may find that this practice increases your desire for sex, builds anticipation, and spurs new possibilities of what you might do together or to each other!

Be gentle with each other as you build this new habit. It may not always be easy to keep this new commitment to carving out alone time together. If you end up skipping one of your date nights, try again next week. If your sex dates don't turn out as planned, try something different next time. Part of building a blissful relationship is demonstrating to yourself that you deserve it!

*Are you someone that prefers spontaneity? In one of life's wonderful paradoxes, by planning 'naked dates' or 'sex dates', you actually can be as spontaneous as you desire within the date itself.*





## PRACTICE 5: REMEMBERING THE LONG GAME

So often in our primary romantic relationships, we get bogged down with the complaints or frustrations of everyday life. Remembering why we are in this relationship, what we agreed to (perhaps in formal vows?), and what our intentions are can provide context for how we respond to the bumps along the road of our journey together.

Imagine that you are feeling the stress of something your partner did (or didn't do). Now, consider how you'll feel about this moment in five years. Ten years. Twenty years. Let yourself really sink into the question and project far into the future. Will "it" still be important? If so, make sure you find an appropriate way to discuss it. But in most cases we have found that the small things suddenly seem less important when compared to the long-term vision for your relationship.

For example, if the shared vision for your relationship is to have a happy, thriving, and playful life together, those intentions are perhaps more important than who took out the trash last night. (By the way, if you don't have a vision for your primary romantic relationship, now is a great time to create it!)

Another way to think about this is - are you focusing on a few snapshots of your life or are you watching the whole movie? In anyone's life, there are isolated moments when we might not be at our best, but if we step back and take in the big picture - we see how much awesomeness there is!

Part of remembering the long game is making time to stay current with each other on a regular basis. Assuming that everything is working, or that you just have to put up with things that don't work for you, can be dangerous for your relationship. The key here is to recognize that when breakdowns occur, they are opportunities to recommit to our long-term visions for the relationship we really want. This provides a positive direction for you to move towards.

### **Questions you can ask to remember the long game:**

- What is my/our vision for this relationship? (In other words, what do you want to experience within the relationship?)
- What can I do in this moment to bring us closer to the quality of relationship we want to experience?
- Am I working with my partner toward our shared goal, or am I standing against them?
- What happens if I zoom out and look at the quality of our entire relationship? What can I do to improve it?
- Am I willing to forgive the small stuff and emphasize the big stuff that is going well?

The journey towards building better relationships takes intentionality and practice. These five practices will help you build a strong foundation for a thriving, satisfying and juicy relationship. Be gentle with yourself as you practice - new habits take time.

Since 1968, HAI Global has dedicated itself to holding people in love, safety, and reverence as they walk the path of exploration of what it means to be fully human. Over 60,000 people around the world have learned how to create more authentic, satisfying, joyful, and sustainable relationships with themselves and others through our in-person and online workshops.

For more information about HAI Global and the work we do, please visit [www.hai.org](http://www.hai.org).



*When we love another,  
we embark on a daring  
adventure. It is the  
adventure of a life-time.  
~Helen Keller*