

Create Romantic Rituals

My wife Athena and I have a daily ritual which I think strengthens our marriage. Every afternoon, we catch up with each other over a pot of hot tea. (We learned to appreciate the daily ritual of taking tea after a visit to England.)

With tea, we usually have a small snack. While polishing off the pot of tea, we sit for 30 minutes or so and discuss how the day went and what our plans might be for that night or the rest of the week. We also discuss future plans and dreams or whatever is on our minds. It's a very worthwhile ritual and one that we plan on continuing indefinitely.

Many couples with children often ask me how they can add romance to their relationship while being surrounded by children. I believe this is one way that couples can spend some special time alone and set a wonderful example for their children that their parents love each other. Of course, you don't have to take up drinking hot tea. You can come home and relax together with a glass of lemonade or another beverage or snack of your choice.

For parents with small children, it might be impossible to spend the quiet time alone until after the children are put to bed. The importance is the uninterrupted time spent together. Whatever means you use to be able to do that consistently is up to you.

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Be Safe While Working on Home Improvement Projects

Deciding to embark on a home improvement project can be fun and exciting. **Here are several things to consider:** • First, decide whether you can do a project yourself, whether you need to hire it done, and what you can afford to do. If you don't feel comfortable doing a job, don't do it. • Research to find out if a project requires special tools that you don't have or that would be too expensive for your budget to rent. It's best to pass on any jobs that require specialized tools. You can probably rent large equipment, but the question after that becomes whether you can operate it skillfully and safely. • Put safety first for your project. Electrical work should be done by a professional. The dangers of shock and electrocution are too great to risk. And as a do-it-yourselfer, you could make dangerous building code violations. If a plumbing job requires more than changing a faucet, you're better off with a professional as well. Water damage is expensive to repair.

When you decide you're capable of doing a job and have the time to do it, keep this safety advice in mind:

- Keep your work area neat. Pick up tools and sharp objects, keep extension cords untangled, and pull nails and screws out of discarded boards. Store tools out of the reach of children and pets.
- Always read the manufacturers' instructions before using any equipment and heed all safety warnings.
- Dress appropriately for the project. Long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and proper footwear can reduce your risk of injury. Make sure long hair doesn't interfere with work.
- When working around electrical outlets, shut off the electricity. Unplug electrical tools before adjusting them.
- Always wear safety goggles to protect eyes from debris.
- Wear protective gloves to shield hands from injury.
- Place ladders on flat, firm surfaces. Keep your weight centered on it.
- Check the labels on varnishes, solvents, adhesives, and other products to see if you need to wear a respirator or mask. Increase the ventilation in the workspace to reduce fumes and dust.
- Always keep a fire extinguisher in your work area.



If Disaster Strikes...

In an article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, a nurse who worked during Hurricane Katrina offered these suggestions for coping with an evacuation: • Be sure everyone is wearing comfortable shoes. Check children, especially. • Keep a bottle of pain reliever with you. • Have flashlights and plenty of "D" batteries. • Have extra underwear for all family members in a water-proof bag. • Find ways to make sure your needs are known. Rescuers may not realize that you need help. • Have courage and remain calm if you're confronted by a fearful, or armed, person. • In shelters, create morale-boosting activities for your family. Tell stories or sing together. • Be encouraging to others.