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## **Date Three of Gottman Eight Dates**

John and Julie Gottman, psychologists and founders of the Gottman Love Lab, have been studying how to win at love for over forty years. After observing thousands of couples, they know the areas in a couple's life that cause the most struggle. Through these eight dates, they lead you through the essential conversations that will give you the best chance at a fulfilling and connected relationship.

### **The Date: Sex and Intimacy**

#### **Conversation Topic**

Exploring and discussing romance, sex, and physical intimacy.

#### **Preparation**

Reflect on what you want sex and passion to look like in your relationship or marriage. What rituals for connection might you create? If sex is hard for you to talk about, be prepared to say so and explore why it's hard. There is no right or wrong way to talk about sex. It starts with being brave enough to say whatever's on your mind.

#### **Location**

For this date you will have a candlelit dinner somewhere. It could be your favorite romantic restaurant or a public place where you can be very private— such as a cove in a beach or a hidden corner of a public garden. The theme is intimacy, sex, and romance. Is there a place that's especially romantic and intimate for you and your partner? You could also do something physical to get into your body before the date, such as dance class, yoga class, or a session of stretching together.

#### **Suggestions**

We suggest that you make this date as romantic and seductive as possible. If you're going out, dress in a way that your partner finds sexy. If you don't know what way this is— ask them. You may even decide to let your partner pick your clothes for this "sex" date. For this conversation, you'll want to be in your body. As you focus on discussing physical intimacy with your partner, tune into your physical experience as well. Midway through the questions, stop and check in with your body and your partner. Is your heart beating quickly? Is your breathing slow or fast? Are you turned on? Slowly scan from the tip of your toes to the crown of your head, checking in with each body part.

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**At-Home Date:** If you're going to have this date at home, arrange to have the place to yourselves and have the date naked, in bed. Or naked in the living room. If you have a beautiful yard or garden, have the date in the garden (but probably clothed).

## Bring

You should bring an open mind and a willingness to be vulnerable with your partner. Adopt a "YES, AND..." attitude instead of a "YES, BUT..." attitude toward your partner's ideas. *Yes, and...* means that you accept everything your partner says as true for them, and in the spirit of improvisation (which is where *Yes, and...* comes from) you add to the conversation and understanding between you. *Yes, but...* negates whatever it is they're sharing. If talking about sex doesn't come easily for you, you may wish to write down your thoughts about this ahead of time and read them to your partner.

## Troubleshooting

- Be as specific as you can about what you like sexually— try not to be vague. Say what you like, not what you don't like.
- Don't compare your sexual experiences with your partner to any other partner.
- If you don't know what your partner is referring to when your partner describes sex, or a sexual act, ask.
- Use any words that are comfortable for you to openly talk about anatomy and sexual activity.
- Be open-minded to whatever turns your partner on, and do not judge them for any fantasies they may have.
- If your partner isn't in the mood to have sex at the end of the date, be accepting, loving, and caring. Never get mad when sex is refused.

## Open-Ended Questions for Your Date Conversation

You'll each take turns asking and answering these questions.

1. Think about all the times we've had sex. What are some of your favorites? What about that time made it your favorite?
2. What turns you on?
3. How can I enhance our passion?
4. What's your favorite way for me to let you know I want to have sex?
5. Where and how do you like to be touched?
6. What's your favorite time to make love and why? What's your favorite position?
7. Is there something sexually you've always wanted to try, but have never asked? How often would you like to have sex?

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8. What can I do to make our sex life better?

## **Affirming Our Future Together**

Take turns reading this affirmation out loud to each other. Maintain eye contact while reciting.

*"I commit to creating our own romantic rituals for connection, and creating more passion outside of the bedroom by expressing my affection and love for you. I commit to having a 6-second kiss\* every time we say goodbye or hello to each other for the next week. I commit to discussing, exploring, and renewing our sexual relationship."*

\*We recommend a 6-second kiss, because when you kiss passionately, you set off a chemical cascade of hormones and neurotransmitters that release dopamine and increase oxytocin, both of which make you feel good. If you really mean it when you kiss, your blood vessels will dilate, your brain will receive extra oxygen, your pupils will dilate, and your cheeks will flush. Lips are our body's most exposed erogenous zone and are associated with a disproportionately large part of the brain. The brain literally lights up with a good kiss, and kissing activates 5 out of 12 cranial nerves. More important, though, for those 6 seconds when you leave each other and when you return to each other, you are disconnecting from the outside world and reconnecting with your partner and the world you are creating together.

Adapted from: *Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. By: John Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, Doug Abrams, and Rachel Carlton Abrams