

The Best Valentine's Day Gift That Couples Should Exchange



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Chocolates are fine. Teddy bears are cute. Roses are a surefire hit. But one of the best gifts that a couple can exchange on Valentine's Day doesn't cost a cent.

This gift might be a bit unconventional, but it can do wonders for your relationship.

Yes, Valentine's Day is a great time for some down and dirty talk about ... your finances.

Really? Talking about money on Valentine's Day?!

OK, so maybe you shouldn't have that conversation over a glass of Pinot Noir during a romantic Valentine's Day dinner by candlelight. You should also probably go ahead and pick up some flowers to bring with you to that dinner instead of your budgeting spreadsheet. However, the truth is that there are few things that are better for a relationship than open and honest communication about money. No, it's not sexy – and probably not much fun – but it is important. Here are a few tips to help with that conversation.

1. Plan ahead: This isn't the type of conversation that should happen spontaneously some night in front of the TV. Perhaps you could mention to your partner that you'd like to carve out time to talk about money in the next few days to make sure that you're both on the same page when it comes to your financial goals. Your tone will be important when you do this, as coming off as accusatory or overly pushy may make your partner reluctant to have the conversation. Timing

can also be crucial. If you can have the conversation when both sides are clear-headed and rested, it can make a big difference. After all, if you're already tired and cranky going into a conversation about something as potentially volatile as money, tensions can bubble over in a hurry.

2. Keep it short the first time: If you haven't really talked about money before, you should view this initial conversation as the first in a series. Whether your finances are a mess, or you're merely looking to perfect what is already working well, it's all about opening a dialogue that, ideally, could last decades.

3. Keep it focused: Don't plan to resolve all of your financial issues and differences in one sitting. If there are too many topics on the table for that first conversation, it can be intimidating or even counterproductive. Just pick one area to focus on and dive fully into that topic. One good starting point: Setting financial goals. Ask each other, "What do you want us to accomplish in the short term and the long term?" Let the conversation grow from there.

4. Keep it positive and aspirational: Talking about money can be intimidating and upsetting, but it doesn't have to be that way. If you focus the conversations and thoughts on how great your lives will be after you make some changes, it can be enormously motivating. Whether you want to finally pay off that credit card debt, so you can quit a second job and spend more time with your family, or you both want to figure out how best to maximize your credit card rewards, so you can finally take that trip to Paris together, staying positive in pursuit of those goals can make you both much more likely to continue to work toward them.

5. Tell the truth: A stunning 12 million Americans say that they have hidden a bank account or checking account from their live-in spouse or significant other. While hiding money might be for noble reasons – who'd begrudge a guy stashing some money somewhere to save for an engagement ring? – many others aren't, which can be destructive to a couple's relationship and their finances. The best policy, typically, is to be as honest and open as possible when it comes to what you're making, spending and saving. That's also true when it comes to setting goals. Share what you really want, and if they match your partner's goals, great. If they don't, that's fine, too. Keep talking and try to find some middle ground both of you can agree on.

6. Don't stop with one conversation: Honest and open communication about money shouldn't just happen once and stop. It should be part of any healthy relationship. Before that first conversation ends, set a time for the next one and determine what you'd like to discuss. That way, both of you can prepare in advance to get the most possible out of the talk. After all, if you both feel like the conversations are valuable and worthwhile, you're more likely to continue to have them. That's the real goal: Keep the conversation going. Do that, and it won't just help your finances, it'll make your relationship stronger, too.

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