



# Focus on HEALTH



CENTER for American Nurses™  
Serving the Needs of Nurses Today & Tomorrow

## Relationships: Love Actually

By Margie Nicks Gale, MSN, RN

**It's** February – the month of love. As Valentine's Day approaches, images of heart shaped cards being exchanged by school aged children fill our mind. Stores are filled with boxes of chocolates wrapped in foil covered heart shaped boxes, and newly released light hearted romantic comedies play at movie theaters. Giving and receiving affection is a core strategy for promoting nurse wellness. Positive relationships are important to our wellness to ensure we are both giving and receiving a healthy level of affection in our daily lives and building healthy relationships.

This month, let's focus on ourselves and strengthen our relationships with those closest to us. Affection is defined as a tender attachment, devotion or love. John Gottman, PhD, has long studied human relationships and is currently conducting a study of healthy relationships funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Gottman believes that "respect and affection are essential to relationships working and contempt destroys them." Developing a positive connection is critical to establishing an emotionally connected relationship. He stresses the importance of maintaining a friendship with your

partner. Gottman has developed a relationship quiz that tests the closeness of your relationship which can be found at [www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com).

Nurturing a strong friendship and enjoying spending time with your life mate are important components of a robust relationship. "Warmth and affection are vital for a healthy relationship," shares Margaret Paul, PhD, author of *Inner Bonding*. When identifying signs of healthy relationships, Paul includes kindness, laughter, trust, and letting go of anger. She cautions that healthy relationships evolve over time so it is important to invest in both yourself and your relationship.

Barbara Bartlein, RN, LCSW, notes that people evolve through relationships and it takes effort to remain connected. "A happy marriage is not an accident. It is the result of hard work and dedication..." says Bartlein. Her book, *Why Did I Marry You Anyway?* offers strategies for a happy marriage. Her book offers concrete solutions to problems in sustaining successful relationships.

Cultivate a friendship with yourself by reading the short classic *The Art of Loving*. Now available in paperback for purchase online or found in most libraries, you will discover the key to loving is the first step of true self love. For everyone who wants to find true happiness reach for the step by step guide based on forty years of research by psychologist Martin Seligman, PhD. You can begin by taking the questionnaires on his website established in collaboration with Time magazine. A current featured scale is the Compassionate Love Scale which measures your tendency to support, help, and understand other people.

Gottman claims healthy intimate relationships need the foundation of a "sound house." Start now on your February journey to build a relationship in which you both give and receive affection and you'll see that Love is...actually all around us.

*Margie Nicks Gale, MSN, RN is a member of the Vanderbilt Nurse Wellness Committee, Nashville, Tennessee.*

### Resources

Bartlein, B. (2003). *Why Did I Marry You Anyway?*. Tennessee: Cumberland House.

Gottman, J. (January 27, 2009) Gottman Institute: Researching and Restoring Relationships, <http://www.gottman.com>

Paul, M. (January 27, 2009) Relationships, Marriage and Parenting, <http://www.innerbonding.com>.

Seligman, M. (January 27, 2009) Authentic Happiness, <http://www.authentichappiness.com>

Vanderbilt Nurse Wellness, (January 27, 2009) <http://www.VanderbiltNurseWellness.com>