

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

A DOZEN WAYS TO LET HIM KNOW YOU CARE

Is your partner embarrassed by flowery sentiments? Would he as soon receive a love letter from you as from his secretary, Bob? When you try to express how much you care about him, does he act as if you are trying to sell him a used vacuum cleaner? When you tell him you love him, does he respond as if you are telling him you intend to smother him with a pillow? Perhaps, when it comes to love, your partner is from the "talk is cheap" school of thought, and you need to find more active ways to let him know that without him, your life would be as drab as a Moscow restaurant. Here are some loving gestures aimed at letting your partner know you love him—even if he *does* have the romantic sensibility of plankton.

1. Rent, watch and pretend to enjoy a World War II movie in which John Wayne (your partner's alter ego) singlehandedly drives twenty thousand Japanese soldiers back to Yokohama, where they open the first sushi bar ever to serve California rolls.
2. Go to his mother's attic and dig out the only extant photograph of his one childhood pet, Happy the Hamster, taken shortly before the benighted creature came to an untimely end under the training wheels of your partner's first bicycle. Give him the photo after first inscribing, "I forgive you—H," beneath the animal's furry little feet.
3. Bring up from the basement the gold corduroy Barcalounger that once held a place of honor in your partner's bachelor digs. Tell him you've changed your mind: You *wouldn't* sooner live with a dead elephant in your living room.
4. Remember what he asked you to do that time the two of you went skinny dipping at midnight in a secluded lake? Offer to do it now.
5. Write your partner a sworn statement vowing never again to tell friends about how, on your trip to New York, he had an attack of claustrophobia inside the Statue of Liberty and, panic-stricken, had to be helped down the stairs by a pack of Cub Scouts from Idaho.
6. Surprise your partner with a five-pound bag of chocolate-covered doughnut holes—the ones he thinks are so terrific, and you think should come labeled with a skull and crossbones.

7. Remove from your dresser and put away forever the framed newspaper photo of you giving a congratulatory kiss to your last boyfriend after he won a Gold Medal in the 1984 Summer Olympics. In its place, set out the snapshot of your partner taken immediately after he came in twelfth in the annual Citywide CPA Four-Mile Marathon.

8. Hand him a promissory note offering to take over the job of cleaning the gutters on your home—in the spring of 1991, if the two of you are still together.

9. Write an apology to your partner in which you admit you were wrong when you greeted his new haircut with a comment to the effect that his haircutter must sport a major dependency on hallucinogenic drugs.

10. Offer to give him a pedicure, even though you have on occasion compared his toenails to Howard Hughes', and even though he says that he doesn't want a pedicure and would prefer a bowl of chili instead. (If he keeps on in this vein, offer to dip his feet in chili.)

11. Volunteer to make dinner, just one more time, for his beloved old high school friend, a man who once used your curtains for a napkin and who believes that a belch is the sincerest form of flattery a hostess could ever hope to receive.

12. Put a pencil and a pad of paper next to all the telephones in the house, so that your partner need no longer complain that taking messages in your home means writing them with his finger in the dust.

If none of these gestures of love gets through to your partner, and you begin to feel a certain level of frustration, do not undo all you have done by expressing your frustration in negative ways. Do not, for instance, knock on his head with your knuckles and ask, "anybody in there?" Remember that nobody's perfect, and that this fact has always been particularly applicable to your partner. Besides, chances are that he *is* getting the drift of your behavior, at least subliminally, and that when you say, "I love you," while standing anywhere in his immediate vicinity, he realizes that you are in all probability speaking to him.

by Bette-Jane Raphael