



Strengthen your relationship - with these books

The New York Times asked 14 psychologists, counsellors and therapists for the titles they recommend to couples.

Reading time: 9 minutes

At Christmas we don't just want to experience more wonder, or rather miracles, see the last BrainCandy. Christmas is also the festival of love. And love is never ever uncomplicated. That's why relationship work in particular needs a little extra help from time to time. BrainCandy readers know that deep social relationships have a strong influence on well-being, health and survival. Men benefit even more than women.

A few weeks ago, the New York Times published a great article on this very topic. What I particularly liked about it was the differentiated approach to advice aimed at different couple contexts. Below is the text by journalist Hope Reese. Reese writes for Vox, The Atlantic, The New York Times and other publications. Her book "The Women Are Not Fine" will be published in 2025. Here is the link to the [original article](#). Which is behind a paywall.

Reese: "There's evidence that strong relationships are central to our happiness and well-being. But getting along with others is complicated, and maintaining healthy romantic relationships in particular can be a challenge.

Therapy can help couples examine "the dance, the pattern, the cycle, the choreography" of their relationship, but it's not accessible to everyone, said Alexandra Solomon, a psychology professor at Northwestern University and host of the "Reimagining Love" podcast. Books often serve as an informal "training programme" that helps partners learn new skills or gain different perspectives, Solomon added.

We asked 14 psychologists, counsellors and therapists to recommend books that can help

nourish relationships. These seven titles rose to the top of the list

1. ["The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work"](#):

A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert," by John Gottman and Nan Silver

Recommended by several of the therapists we interviewed, "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" offers practical tips for strengthening relationships, from "turning towards" each other to overcoming gridlock – which happens when couples are stuck in a disagreement.

Dr. Gottman and his wife Julie Gottman [have been researching what makes couples work for decades](#). In this book, he and his co-author Silver unpack the research on "couples that survive and couples that don't," according to Jodie Milton, a relationship coach trained in the Gottman Method and based in Portugal. The resulting advice is rooted in these findings, she said. (There is also an edition in [German](#))

2. ["Come as You Are"](#):

The surprising new science that will change your sex life", by Emily Nagoski

Misconceptions about a low libido can cause "a lot of conflict in relationships and a lot of shame for women," Ms Milton said. But "Come as You Are" dives into the science of sex, arguing "that there is no such thing as a sex drive," she said. Instead, Dr Nagoski claims that humans have a brake and an accelerator and that these mechanisms cause arousal.



Amy Julia Cheyfitz, a sex therapist in the D.C. area, said the book "normalises the variety of ways we engage in sex." (This book has a lot of positive reviews. There is also an older version in [German](#)).

3. "[Hold Me Tight](#)":

Seven conversations for a lifetime of love" by Sue Johnson

Dr. Johnson is a clinical psychologist and the founder of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, an approach that focuses on strengthening the emotional connection between partners. In "Hold Me Tight," she skilfully explores how people in relationships can struggle to maintain the connection, said Jean Fitzpatrick, a psychotherapist and marriage counsellor in New York.

"Without blaming anyone," the book helps partners "recognise their patterns and learn to create more fulfilling and loving interactions," says Allen Sabey, clinical assistant professor and faculty member at The Family Institute at Northwestern University. (Here is the link to the recently published workbook in [German](#))

4. "[Getting Past the Affair](#)":

A programme to help you cope, heal and move on - together or apart", by Douglas Snyder, Donald Baucom and Kristina Coop Gordon

"Getting Past the Affair" provides a framework to help couples slow down and decide how to move forward after infidelity, said Adam Fisher, an assistant professor of clinical studies at Brigham Young University who teaches a course titled "Relationship Intelligence: Building Healthy and Lasting Relationships." The text defuses some of the chaos couples face, he said, by dividing the aftermath of cheating into phases.

One caveat: The book presents practical tools for couples dealing with an affair, but it's often "best for a couple to also see a professional if there has been infidelity in a relationship," Ms Milton said, "because it's a really difficult thing to heal and work through." (Our Psychodrama moderators would give you the same advice)

5. "[Us](#)": Getting Past You and Me to Build a More Loving Relationship", by Terrence Real

In "Us," Real, a family therapist who has [worked with couples](#) for more than 30 years, unpacks how we need to move away from our culture of individualism to form healthy relationships. He also names how patterns from childhood show up in the present and encourages accountability," says Dr Sabey.

The book looks at both partners in a relationship and uses examples to show how real couples have overcome obstacles using these skills.

"Terry has a way of speaking to men that is both gentle and firm - there are not many places to hide," said Dr Solomon. "He engages the reader in a way that is absolutely essential."

6. "[Mating in Captivity](#)":

Unlocking Erotic Intelligence, by Esther Perel
In "Mating in Captivity", Esther Perel, therapist and host of the podcast "Where Should We Begin?", describes how domestic partnership affects lust. Dr Solomon recommends it to couples at any stage of the relationship, although she says Ms Perel has "a special eye on couples raising their family".

The book will help readers "honor the complexities of all these roles - lover and partner, parent and employee", as well as the challenges a couple may have in switching between these roles, Dr Solomon said. There will be no easy answers, but it will put into words the complexity we feel and why we're feeling alone," she added. (There is also a current [German version](#))



7. "[All About Love: New Visions](#)",
from Bell Hooks

In "All About Love", [Bell Hooks](#), a pioneering feminist scholar and author of more than 30 books, explores the question of what it actually means to love someone. "The word 'love' is usually defined as a noun," she writes, "but we would all love better if we used it as a verb."

Callisto Adams, a dating and relationship coach, recommends the book to couples who are grappling with mismatched or "false expectations", because it challenges traditional "perceptions of love", she said.

Although this book is not a guidebook with lots of tips, it is "quite moving and thoughtful-", says Dr Sabey. "It enlightens, comforts and confronts". (And the current version is also available in [German](#))

This brings us to the end of Reese's article. I was pleased to see that all of these books are

available from Amazon.de and that some of them are also available in German editions. Of course, I also used Google and AI to search for German authors on the subject of couples therapy. Most of the books have meagre coverage compared to the bestsellers above. However, one current book seems to be on the right track: Neumann, Anna-Lena: [Paartherapie](#) to go. I'm only listing the book here, I can't say anything about it myself.

If you ask directly about sex therapy, it doesn't look much more exciting. Two books stand out easily according to reviews: Roidinger Beatrix: [Sexpositiv](#). Renegotiating intimacy and relationships. And the doctor and podcaster Melanie Büttner: [Is this normal](#): let's talk about sex the way you want it.

So, no one should be short of ideas for some valuable work on their relationship. Make the most of the time between the years, especially if the stress of the festive season has been high, it should be even more worthwhile.



Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#).



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