

# Date Night for Mum and Dad



Keeping a relationship strong can sometimes be pretty difficult. Throw kids into the mix and it can get all the more challenging. But a regular “date night” is always important in keeping the chemistry alive.

WORDS DR NICOLA DAVIES

When a couple fall in love and get married, it's all about good times spent together enjoying each other's company. Then life intervenes in the form of children. Suddenly, the couple has to balance family life and work demands and somehow, quality time spent together becomes a scarce commodity. Of course, a couple's priorities have to change once they have a 'bundle of joy' to care for, but letting their own relationship take the back seat can lead to the ultimate dissolution of the relationship.

A report in the Daily Mail newspaper cites the results of a survey which found that 42 per cent of divorced couples found that having children drove them apart rather than making them closer. Four out of five couples say that their relationship suffered after the birth of a new baby and that the pressure of having young children caused problems in their relationship. Up to 15 per cent of couples said they were unable to spend quality time together after the birth of their first child, while 14 per cent managed one date a year.

## It's Not Just About You

Many couples experience feelings of guilt when they find themselves wanting to 'escape' their children for a few hours of fun together. However, spending time together in a relaxed, child-free environment increases a couple's chances of staying together.

Lys Stern, CEO of divamoms.com says that weekly date nights are essential in keeping parents together. Getting away from the domestic scene is important. As long as you're at home, you'll be open to interruptions from the kids. Getting out of the house and enjoying time together helps to keep couples in touch with each other – otherwise, it ends up being all about the children; small wonder that many couples find themselves drifting apart once they've started a family.

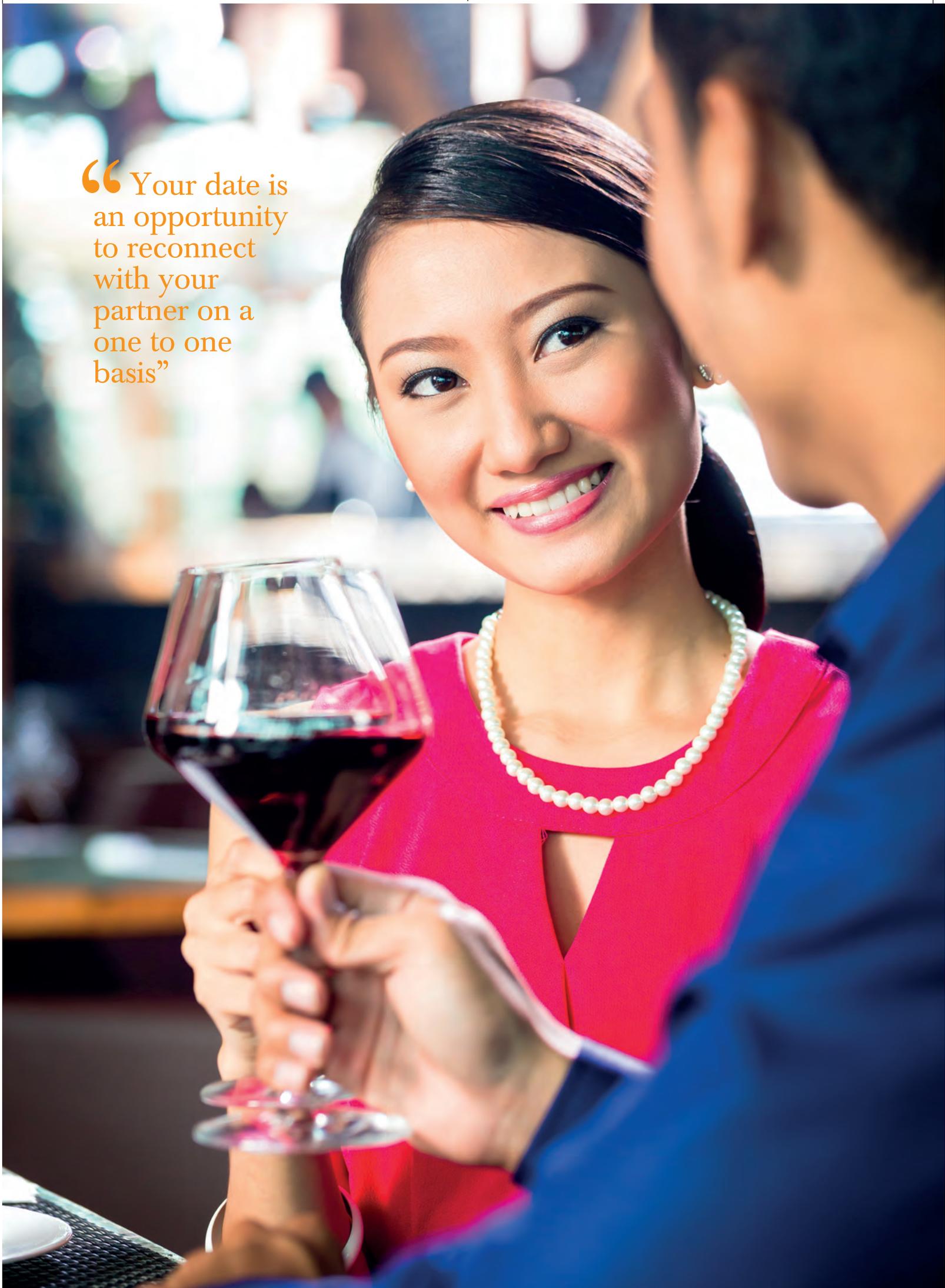
The American Psychology Association (APA) recommends weekly date nights in order to keep your relationship fresh and romantic. Vary your experiences. Going to the same restaurant or hitting the movies every date night will soon become stale. The APA recommends trying new activities together in order to keep date nights exciting.

## Benefits of Date Night

Although date night is good for your marriage, it's no grim duty. Rekindle romance by getting back in touch with the things that attracted you to each other in the first place. There's only one rule: leave domestic issues and work worries behind you. Date night is your opportunity to escape from humdrum pressures and have fun together. You'll find yourselves spending time

**Making time to enjoy each other's company is an important step in keeping your family unit strong.**

“Your date is an opportunity to reconnect with your partner on a one to one basis”



discussing matters of more importance than who's going to load the dishwasher and what should be on the shopping list.

A study conducted by the University of Virginia found that the benefits of date night could be summed up as: Communication, romance, commitment and de-stress. The study demonstrated that married couples who went out on a weekly date were on average 3.5 per cent more likely to declare themselves 'Very happily married.'

The researchers also examined divorce rates in relation to 'couple time.'

## Couples who spent more time together showed a much lower incidence of divorce than couples who rarely spent time together.

The incidence of divorce in couples who spend little time together is 21 per cent, while couples who date at least once a week have only a 14 to 16 per cent chance of a relationship that ends in divorce.

### How to Make it Happen

#### Commit

Just saying you'll have a date night now and then, isn't going to work. You need to decide on a time that will suit both of you and commit to making your weekly date a priority. After all, it's a commitment towards maintaining a close relationship, and that's good for the whole family.



#### Plan

If you're dating on a tight budget, there's no need to despair. You don't have to go on a five star date every week. Visit a market, go for a long walk together, or admire an art exhibition. Keep an eye on the local press and community websites in order to see what's on. Planning your dates in advance adds to the excitement and keeps you from falling into a rut. When did you last go tenpin bowling? How about a round of miniature golf? Keeping your dates novel and breaking with routine will add to the fun of planning.

#### Organise

Organising someone to look after your children is an important step. If you don't know a good babysitter in your area, you can start by asking other couples you trust for recommendations. Making sure that your children have fun activities to participate in while you're out on your date helps to ease the guilt many parents experience when they go out without their children. Having a regular babysitter who is a favourite with your children or leaving them with a popular aunt or family friend helps you to relax while you're out and about.

You can look for qualified babysitters through reputable agencies. A good sitter should have references, training in child care, and should be able to get along well with your children. If your kids have play dates, see if you and your partner can get together and enjoy the opportunity for a family outing.

#### Be there

In today's busy world, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by work and family commitments. At times, putting off your date may be tempting. Remember that date night with your partner is an investment in your happiness and your future together. That makes it a very important commitment. Don't postpone your date for anything less than a life-or-death emergency.

#### Make the next date

Take turns in deciding on the activity you'll share on the next date, but be sure to have a plan and a firm commitment to the next outing. Of course, if your partner wants to surprise you, you won't refuse!

### Enjoy Yourself

As long as you've ensured that a responsible person is looking after your children, there's no point in worrying about what's happening at home. A reliable babysitter will contact you immediately if there is any emergency, but after all, the chance of one arising is very small indeed. You've earned the privilege of a little time out from the constant demands of parenting, so enjoy your freedom.

Your date is an opportunity to reconnect with your partner on a one to one basis. Don't let it go to waste. Focus on each other as you did when you first started dating and wanted to impress one another. Revel in the togetherness. Your children will be the centre of your attention for the rest of the week, but for now, they're well looked after and you can forget about being mum for a few hours. **m**