

The trick to loving

Tim O'Leary and Julie Houghton

IF YOU watch the average romantic movie, chances are one of the most natural things you will hear several times is "I love you". But switch to real life and those three little words can be some of the most difficult to say.

Why are they so difficult and why is it so important for our relationships that we make the effort to say them?

We all have a need to feel loved and to consider ourselves as lovable. But sometimes as we emerge from childhood to adulthood we can doubt just how lovable we are.

So perhaps it takes a lot of self-confidence to put ourselves on the line and tell our partners that we love them.

One of the most common things a relationships counsellor will hear is, "I shouldn't have to tell him/her that I love them — he/she should know that I love them."

Part of the challenge in any relationship is to understand what your partner's needs are in terms of being loved and feeling lovable. That's where the need to understand each other's love language comes in.

Given that opposites frequently attract, there's a high likelihood that the two partners might express "I love you" in totally different ways.

Juliet might need the verbal affirmation of being told Romeo loves her, whereas Romeo might prefer to receive Juliet's way of saying she loves him when she serves up a delicious meal that just happens to include all his favourites. Or vice versa.

The trick here is to recognise the "I love you" message and acknowledge it.

There's also no shame in directly asking your partner what makes them feel loved. If one partner says they need lots of hugs, then that's something the other partner can take on board, even if it's not their natural inclination to be tactile: it's something they can do for their loved one.

Don't just assume you know: ask what it is that your partner needs to be reassured that you love them.

Take the time to look back and do a spot check on how much you have done to show your partner you love them. If the credit side is looking a little thin, now is the time to rectify the imbalance.

After all, you know what you need to do: it's not rocket science. It's simply a little attention to the most important relationship in your life.

Tim O'Leary is a counsellor with Relationships Australia.
Ph: 1300 364 277 or visit www.relationships.com.au

Survival tips

- Saying 'I love you' reassures your partner that they are lovable.
- This might be expressed in other ways than simply saying it.
- Understand and acknowledge partners always need to reassure each other they are loved.