

Friendships on Fire

Balance between Passion and Friendship

By Dr. Linda Miles

Forest Rangers use controlled burns to rid the forest of underbrush and keep it healthy. A loving and lasting relationship needs the same care. You need enough passion to keep the sparks flying and enough friendship for safety.

There was a time when the Forest Service attempted to put out every blaze, no matter how small, as soon as possible. In recent years they realized that simply containing some of the fires was better for the forest. They also learned that the fire could not be allowed to burn unrestricted without harming the fragile ecosystem—plants, animals, soil, water, air. It needed to be controlled, creating a balance of ridding the forest of dead wood and thick underbrush thus eliminating fuel for a future fire while protecting the forest’s ecosystem.

Relationships are much like the forests; they need balance. Friendship on Fire offers a balance between passion and friendship. To have and to hold a healthy, long-term relationship, you need both.

You need to control the flames without extinguishing embers. Healthy couples repair conflicts in a timely way. They use friendship skills like compassion and respect to set controlled burns. They do not let bad feelings smolder for years. Holding on to anger is like holding a hot charcoal briquette in your hand with the intention of throwing it at your partner. *You’ll* get burned!

By illuminating and dealing with your differences, you let go of the past. A controlled burn brings forgiveness as anger and grief are released. If the flames spread too quickly, friendship holds the tools for control and repair. By burning off hurts in a timely and constructive way, those with loving relationships embrace the present through laughter and love.

Friendship on Fire is about daily appreciation for the home fires that forge you into better people and the quiet expression of a lifetime of friendship. When your brain believes you are in trouble it sends out messengers—a fire alarm—to break out the adrenalin, the first line of emotional defense.


The cavemen had it as a means of survival, and your bodies still use the same chemical pathways for protection. It doesn’t matter if the trouble is real or imagined. Your wild imagination can start a brushfire. If you believe a tiger is about to attack you, your body prepares to flee, fight, or freeze. Your body reacts the same way to a battle—real or imagined—with your partner.

Develop your own fire alarm to let the other person know when you need to calm down. Learn to signal with one another to take a timeout, repair, and reconnect. Don’t let the embers of friendship erupt into an uncontrolled blaze and burn out the relationship. Use that fire alarm to dampen the flames and get back on the track of enjoying one another.

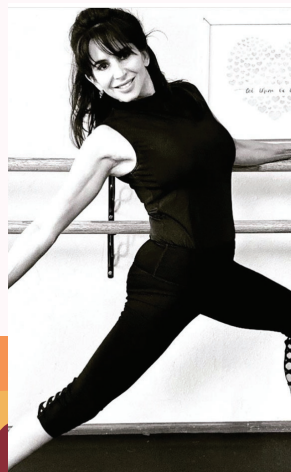
Words to the wise: recognize that sometimes underbrush may have built up and started a firestorm. You need professional help. Don’t be afraid to get the help you need, even if your partner won’t participate. Your mental and physical health is important to you and your loved ones.

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