

A change of season is the best time to de-clutter and take stock – not least of all in your relationships. Here, life coach Ellen Shilling helps us take the ultimate Feng Shui approach to our love lives.

**1 BREAK STAGNANT PATTERNS**  
**Problem:** Everything runs like clockwork, which is great for keeping organised, not so great for stoking the fires of your more romantic side.  
*Ellen Says:* “Mix things up. Take yourself out of your comfort zone and do something different. Nothing spices up a relationship more than breaking routine. So check out the activities in your local area, explore a new city, walk in the mountains or take part in a new event. Whatever appeals to you and your partner, commit to trying something new at least once a month.”

**2 DITCH ‘NAGGING’ BEHAVIOUR**  
**Problem:** The daily chores of life are taking their toll – and he doesn’t seem to be pulling his weight. Result? You’ve turned into the nag you promised yourself you’d never be.  
*Ellen says:* “Take some time to ask him why he’s leaving the toilet seat up/lights on/using a fork in the butter, and explain why it annoys you. Then let it go. Nagging is never a good thing, gentle reminders work a lot more effectively.”

**3 STOP BAD DECISION MAKING**  
**Problem:** You seem to attract the ‘wrong type’, or frequently end up in the same bad patterns in every relationship.

*Ellen says:* “Learn from your past and don’t repeat mistakes. Mistakes are part of human behaviour and we all make them. Appreciate your mistakes for the lessons they’ve taught you but don’t bring them into your life now. So wait till you hear your partner’s explanation for why he didn’t tell you about the weekend away with the boys till the last minutes before jumping to the conclusion that you can’t trust him (because you didn’t trust your last partner).”

**4 BANISH LOW SELF-ESTEEM**  
**Problem:** You don’t have enough self-confidence to believe that someone really does love you – truly, madly deeply.

*Ellen says:* “Work on yourself. The old cliché – no one will love you until you love yourself – is true. You will put up with bad behaviour if you’ve low self esteem. Improve this and you’ll be able to set boundaries, feel happier and be more content than you’ve ever been. This is the most important tip in feng shui’ing your relationship.”

**5 FORGET MATERIALISM**  
**Problem:** Tightening the belt has meant fewer holidays, sharing a car and a severe lacking of spontaneous gifting. Birthdays and occasions are not what they used to be.  
*Ellen says:* “Things come and go, a new car isn’t going to keep you warm at night. Romance doesn’t have to cost the earth. Make a CD for your partner or create a photo album, this is much more thoughtful than picking up a bunch of flowers.”

**6 UNDO UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**  
**Problem:** He doesn’t behave how you expect him to/say what you would expect him to say, thus causing arguments.  
*Ellen says:* “My mother always said to me ‘expect nothing and you’ll be surprised’. Give something for giving sake but don’t expect anything in return. By taking the pressure off you will allow your partner

to be romantic, thoughtful and caring without feeling under obligation that he has to do so. If you set your expectations unrealistically no one will ever be able to meet them, including yourself.”

**7 LET GO OF OLD ARGUMENTS**  
**Problem:** Each row is a re-hashing of everything that has happened in your relationship since year dot.  
*Ellen says:* “Once an argument is over, forget about it. There is no point holding a grudge. Make your point when you are calm and explain why you were angry and upset. Talk about it and get everything out in the open. Then don’t bring it up again.”

**8 DON’T HOLD GRUDGES**  
**Problem:** Apologies have been swapped, and all is forgotten... except in your mind it didn’t get resolved fairly, and you’re actually still annoyed.  
*Ellen says:* “As before, let go of the past. ‘What you need to know about the past is that no matter what has happened, it has all worked together to bring you to this very moment. And this is the moment that you can choose to make everything new. Right now.’ Al Franken.”

**9 RECOGNISE EXTERNAL AGGRESSORS**  
**Problem:** Extended family issues, work pressures and financial strains are all taking their toll on your relationship.  
*Ellen says:* “Take yourself out of toxic environments or change your reaction to them. We can’t change other people only our response to them. If you don’t get on with his friends or family then ask yourself why. It may be a case that old emotions and insecurities are triggered when you’re in their company. If so, it would be worth while working on changing your reaction to them or working with a professional to improve your self confidence. If you need to, limit the amount of time you are in their company, but don’t expect your partner to do the same. Give him the freedom to do what he wants to do and not what you tell him.”

**10 GET OVER THE MOLEHILLS, CLIMB THE MOUNTAINS**  
**Problem:** You’re stuck in a rut of rowing that means even minor issues are getting blown out of proportion. Dealing with any serious or life-altering issues seems unachievable.  
*Ellen says:* “Communication is the most important thing in a relationship. Talk to each other regularly and deal openly and honestly with the molehills. Once you do, the mountains that are challenging will only serve to bring you closer together and make your relationship stronger.” ■

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