

Relationship Advice: Get the Birthday Gift Right



By Dr. Jane Greer

Birthdays are generally synonymous with hopes, cakes, and, of course, presents, but they can also be tinged with disappointment since there are so many expectations wrapped into this one special day, and emotions can run high. Sometimes the gift is perfect. For example, Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas celebrated his 26th birthday together this past week at a baseball game which, according to social media, seemed to be exactly what he wanted. A misstep with the all-important gift, however, can sometimes be the very thing that sinks the ship, and can not only ruin the day, but can also breed resentment for a long time afterward.

Whether you're dating someone, or you've been married for years, getting the birthday present right can be a challenge. Your partner has wishes you may not be aware of, and you might not be sure what to get. How can you live up to meeting their desires, and where do you start?

There are a few things that can lead you down the wrong path while you are contemplating that purchase. To begin with, if you have not paid attention to what they have appeared to be interested in over the past few weeks or months, like the scarf she stopped to look at in the store window, or if you have missed their hints, like the massage he always says he would like to get, then you may have no idea where to begin. If that's the case, when they tear away the tissue paper, hoping to find something specific looking back at them but find something out of left field, your gift might be met with disappointment. Along the same lines, it is never a great idea to simply buy what you like or want with no consideration to whether or not your partner might feel the same way. Just because it is your taste does not mean it is theirs. If they say they want a sweater, before choosing the one you would buy for yourself, instead think about their preferences and previous choices. Similarly, you might see this as a good time to get something practical, why not? You really need that better coffee maker or expensive knife. Here is another way you can go awry, though, since your partner might not appreciate that, and may be hoping for something more personal

and indulgent. Finally, while some do like a joint activity to be the gift, as was the case with Nick Jonas, not everyone falls into that camp. Make sure that is okay before you take the plunge, since some might see it as encroaching on their birthday, which they don't want to share, since they want it to be only about them.

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For any and all of these reasons, browsing online or in a store can feel like a minefield that could blow up in your face at any moment. So, what can you do to avoid that? Begin by asking what they want in advance, even going as far as requesting that they make up a birthday list. Think about suggesting that the list have three or four items that fall into different price ranges. That way you can have options, and you will know that whatever you choose will be well received. Another possibility might be to take them to a favorite store and have them try on a few things. You can go back later and choose one or more of those items, and it will still be a surprise, but you know it is something they will enjoy. Finally, you can simply get a gift card to a store or spa you know they like so they can select what they want, going back at a later date either by themselves or together to make an outing out of it.

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Sometimes people are reluctant to make a present list because they think it spoils the surprise of the gift, which can be nice but not necessary. They also may think they are making it too easy for their partner by telling them what they want. But the truth is it is more about the pleasure and the good feelings a great gift will generate over time. By helping your partner out so they know precisely how to please you, you guarantee a happy outcome, which is what matters most. The

goal is to get what you want, it isn't a contest to see if your partner can figure it out.

It is likely that the way you give gifts comes from the way the family you grew up with gave gifts – in other words, that is what you know, and naturally you continue that pattern. The trick is to be open and aware of your partner's ways and preferences, so you can develop your own gift-giving protocol together. It sounds like Priyanka and Nick have been able to do just that.

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