

## **Tune-up your relationship**

Relationships, like cars, sometimes run rough. The difference is that most of us take the car to get fixed, or tinker with the engine ourselves. Relationships also need tune-ups in order to function as smoothly as they can.

If you have caught the problem early, try a relationship tune-up with just the two of you. Perhaps things have got out of hand? Then you would benefit from a relationship “mechanic”: a qualified and experienced relationship counsellor.

A tune-up involves time, effort and patience. Not money. You need to have one every week, if not more. Start by setting aside time with no phone, children or distractions. You need some tools: respect, careful listening, and patience to express yourself and to hear what your partner is really saying.

Most couples need a signal, usually non-verbal (e.g. putting your hand up as a stop signal) for those things that feel too hot to handle or difficult for you. If one of you becomes angry, take at least 20 minutes apart to cool down, or agree to come back to this topic at a set time on another day. Stick to the any agreements made: this develops trust and shows respect.

Tune ups need to include times when you have fun as a couple. If you laugh together, that is a clue that things are warming up. Regular tune-ups should lead to greater enjoyment of each other, a happier family life, and even better sex. If not, it may be time to book in to that mechanic. Happy driving.