

union made

Strengthen your relationship with partner yoga.

One of the best ways of cultivating intimacy in a relationship is by spending time together doing something you love—especially when it's an activity

that builds trust and opens new channels of communication. So why not make this the year you and your sweetie try partner yoga? A study in the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* by Jim Carson, a clinical psychologist and meditation teacher, and his wife, Kimberly Carson, a yoga therapist, suggests that couples who practice partner yoga are more content with each other and report more joyful sex lives.

Familiar poses take on new life and promote a different level of awareness when practiced in tandem. "In partner yoga, two people come together to create a single pose," says Cain Carroll, a yoga teacher and the author of *Partner Yoga*. "It's almost like the pose has its own body, its own energy flow." Many couples that attend Carroll's partner yoga classes comprise one experienced practitioner and one newcomer to yoga. Carroll urges experienced yogis not to coach their partners, and he cautions beginners not to try to do a pose the same way that the more experienced partner does: "Couples assume they have to do the same thing, but the posture is where you meet, not whether you have the same level of flexibility," he says.

Just be prepared to bring all of your relationship to the mat, where partner yoga can challenge your willingness to depend physically on your partner. If you think of yourself as the strong one in the relationship, you might be comfortable lifting your partner but less comfortable when it comes time to let your partner lift you. Says Carroll, "When your skill or strength levels don't match up, how you respond and how you work with your partner to bring the pose together can be enlightening." HEATHER BOERNER



partner play

Many poses can be adapted to a partner practice, such as these taught by Cain Carroll. The key, he says, is to let each person's flexibility and strength make the pose what it is.



Double Chair Pose



Double Boat Pose



Child-Camel Pose

BUILD TRUST WITH DOUBLE CHAIR POSE

Stand back-to-back, linking arms with your partner. Take a few small steps forward, keeping your backs pressed together (especially your lower backs and sacrum). Lean your weight against each other and continue stepping out until your thighs are parallel to the floor and your shins are perpendicular to the floor. Hold the pose for 10 to 30 seconds.

SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN DOUBLE BOAT POSE

Sit facing your partner with knees bent and toes pointed upward, touching your partner's toes. Link hands or wrists. Inhale and lengthen your spine. Using the counterpressure of your partner's foot, straighten one leg at a time as you exhale, pausing for a few breaths after straightening the first leg. Lift from your chest, keeping your back lengthened. Breathe deeply and hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Come out one leg at a time.

SURRENDER IN CHILD-CAMEL POSE

Partner 1, come into Child's Pose. Partner 2, kneel and place your lower legs and feet on the ground outside your partner's legs. (If one of you is much taller, start farther apart and toe-to-toe, as pictured.) Lengthen through your spine and breathe. Partner 2, exhale and support yourself as you lean back over your partner. Release your arms overhead. To come out of the pose, lead with your hips instead of lifting from the head or straining the neck.