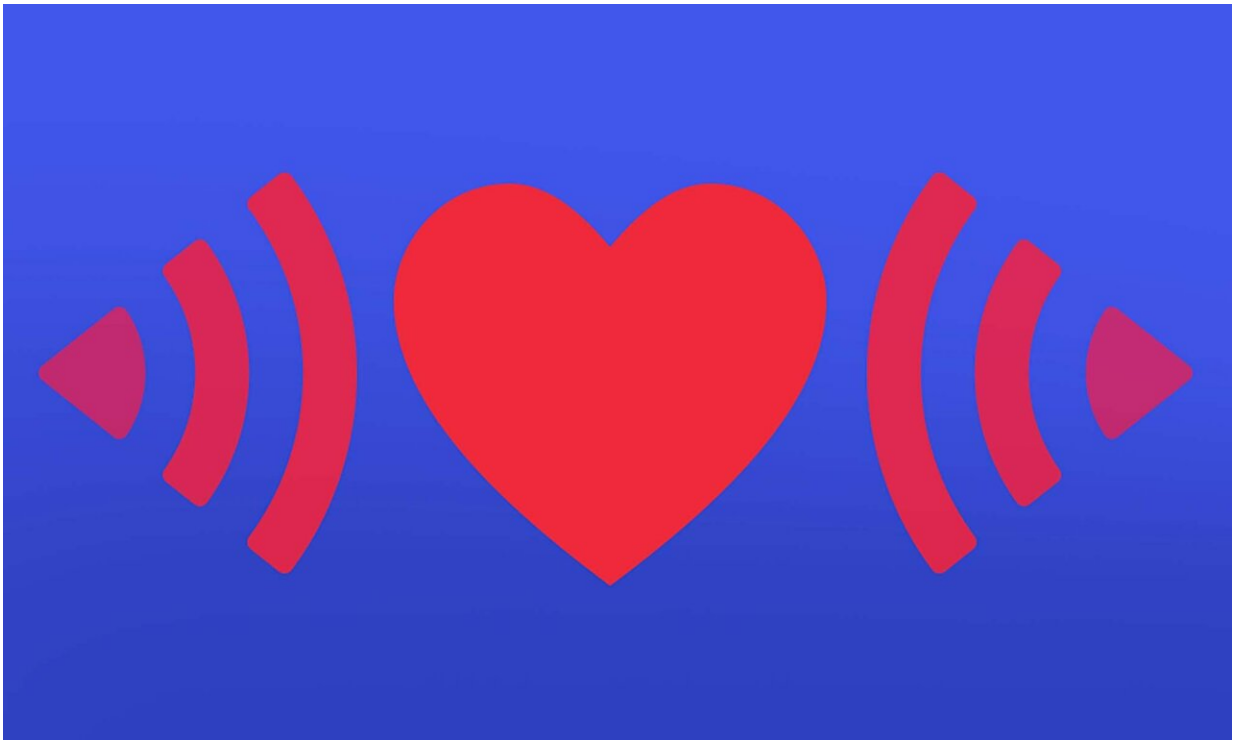


# Can an app improve your romantic relationship?

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Heart to heart: The relationship app Agapé, codeveloped by psychologist Ronald Rogge, sends registered couples a daily prompt. Once both partners have answered the prompt, they can see each other's responses, possibly sparking a meaningful conversation. Credit: University of Rochester / Julia Joshpe

Half of all marriages in the United States [are likely to fail](#) by the time the spouses reach their 50s. Understandably, many couples are looking

for ways to avoid becoming part of that statistic, well aware of a divorce's possible wide-reaching detrimental effects on families, children, personal finances, individual well-being—and direct and indirect costs to society.

Ronald Rogge, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, has been researching the complex dynamics of romantic relationships and families for nearly three decades, searching for ways to help couples nurture and strengthen their love.

One of those ways—his newest and "most successful project, based on its extensive reach," Rogge says—is a relationship app that he codeveloped with a former University of Rochester student, Khadesha Okwudili. In a [recent pilot study](#), published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*, Rogge found that the overwhelming majority of study participants—8 out of 10—reported improved and healthier relationships after one month of app usage.

"Our primary goal was to create an app that couples would intrinsically enjoy using, which would naturally grow in popularity, and thereby organically extend its reach," says Rogge.

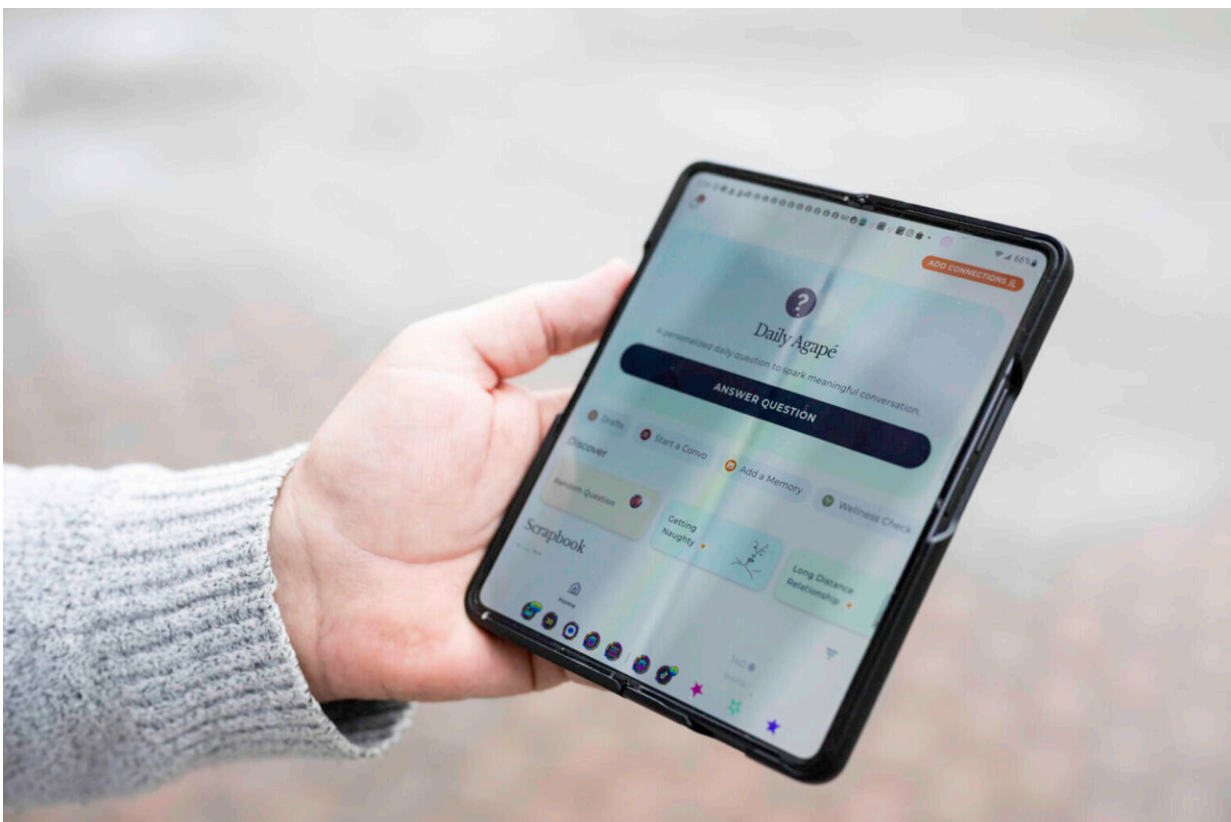
Barely in her twenties, Okwudili was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart arrhythmia disorder. Several near-death experiences inspired her to ask more meaningful questions of the people she loved, "because I wasn't sure how much time I would have left with them," Okwudili recalls.

"Over time, I realized that although my health was deteriorating, my relationships started thriving in a way that they hadn't before." Together with Rogge, she began to develop and test content for Agapé, generating thousands of questions that would be relevant for a wide range of couples.

## How does the Agapé relationship app work?

Agapé sends registered couples a daily prompt, such as "What's something that your partner did in the past week that made you laugh?" or "Describe a time you were thankful to have your partner by your side" or "If your partner had a theme song that would play around them as they went through their day, what would it be and why?" Or something more outlandish, such as: "What unique skills would your partner bring to surviving a zombie apocalypse?"

Once both partners have answered the prompt, they can see each other's responses, possibly sparking a meaningful conversation, "enhancing awareness" and promoting "moments of connection," says Rogge, who has pilot tested over 4,000 prompts over the last four years, grounded in marital and couples research of the last 40 years.



Putting the "app" in happy: “We found that regular app use really mattered. Couples who completed more daily prompts had stronger gains in their relationships,” says app cofounder and study coauthor Ronald Rogge. Credit: University of Rochester / J. Adam Fenster

## **How effective is the app? A scientific test**

For the recent pilot study, the researchers recruited 405 romantic couples. Of these, 91% were heterosexual and the vast majority (84%) in their twenties and thirties. The couples had been in their current relationships for an average of 4.6 years. While most couples in the study, 31% of whom were married, were reasonably satisfied with their relationships, roughly a third were notably not.

The team followed the participants over the course of one month on the app, during which the couples completed baseline assessments at the start, shorter weekly wellness checks within the app, and again an assessment at the end of the month. Engagement remained high throughout, with 99% of couples using the app, and 88% providing follow-up data.

## **Key findings**

- 80% of participants reported improved romantic relationships, including a decrease in perceived negative relationship qualities, and an increase in relationship satisfaction and dedication.
- 70% saw improvements in their own well-being, such as reporting higher vitality and a better quality of life, concurrent with a noticeable drop in depressive symptoms.

- Couples who completed more daily prompts had stronger gains in [relationship](#) quality.
- 93% said the app was enjoyable, and 74% said it was easy to use, which the researchers hope will increase the likelihood of regular use.

Over the past half-century, a wide range of interventions to make relationships stronger have been developed. Yet research has shown that practical barriers, such as the need for trained facilitators, have resulted in limited dissemination. Other self-directed interventions, while cheap and practical, were often hampered in their reach and effectiveness by low levels of engagement, with couples completing only a small fraction of the requirements.

Rogge is excited about the app project because "it helps get my research into the hands of millions of couples and, I hope, will actually improve their lives."

Although the present study focuses on romantic relationships, the app can also be used to help you feel close to friends or family. According to the team, the [fundamental principles](#) that underpin [couples'](#) ties generalize to other kinds of close relationships.

"Using the app with more people in your life is likely to have even stronger individual benefits because we know that connecting with others is a fundamental psychological need," Rogge says.

**More information:** Ronald D. Rogge et al, Connection at your fingertips: A first look at the Agapé app's contributions to healthy relationships., *Journal of Family Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/fam0001166](#)

Provided by University of Rochester

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