

Marriage Preparation: Helpful (and Not-So-Helpful) Questions to Ask Before You Marry



You can prepare for the gifts & challenges of marriage

Every day people are preparing for life's challenges—studying for a test, practicing for a job interview, reviewing for the big work presentation, etc. Unfortunately, all too often, this better-to-be-prepared-than-blindsided mindset doesn't follow people into their relationships.

Preparing for marriage or a committed, long-term relationship (especially one where you'll be cohabitating with your partner) is an important step in acquiring the tools needed to navigate the complex terrain of love and intimacy.

When it comes to romance, many people seem to take one of two approaches:

They blindly (and impulsively) jump into a relationship and hope for the best

~or~

*They seek a **guarantee** that love will last.*

Both approaches are problematic.

The first leaves you ill-equipped to handle what's ahead, while the second prevents you from being open to and appreciating the mysteries that will unfold right under your nose.

Does the need for certainty and love really mix?

April wanted premarital counseling—at least she thought she did. It quickly became apparent that she wanted to know if her fiancé was “the right one” before she was willing to take the next commitment step. She was frozen in fear, frozen by her need for *certainty*.

The “Is s/he the right one for me?” question can become a hurdle to a fulfilling relationship. The question assumes that there is one person out in the universe who can magically fit into your life—someone who would be *perfect* for you. When you get stuck on this question, in essence you’re searching for a pre-fabricated soulmate, someone so compatible and attuned to your needs that your marriage or relationship is destined for success. Successful long-term relationships succeed because of hard work and consistent effort by both individuals, not because someone happened to find “the right one.”

Such a mindset can only set the stage for disappointment and disillusionment.

When you hear yourself asking, “Is s/he the right one for me?”, take a deep breath and replace this question with the following:

- Does this person appear committed and dedicated to putting in the time and effort required to build a life together?
- Do we share similar goals and a relationship vision that will allow us to work together as a team?
- Which intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual needs do I want met in a relationship? Are these compatible with my partner’s needs?
- Which incompatibilities exist and can I accept these differences?

A note about compatibility–

Think of compatibility as running on a continuum:

not at all _____ slightly _____ moderately _____ highly compatible

There will be areas of your relationship where you and your partner lack compatibility, areas where you’re slightly compatible, and areas where you are moderately and highly compatible. Having a range of compatibilities and incompatibilities is perfectly normal.

Rather than focusing your energies on the broad question, “Are we compatible?” it might be more helpful to list all the areas of the relationship where you’re incompatible, slightly compatible, etc. Hopefully, you’ll be moderately and highly compatible in the areas of the relationship that are most important to you.

Don’t worry if you and your partner lack compatibility in places that aren’t that important to you. For instance, if you enjoy lingering in coffee shops in your spare time and your partner prefers hiking, you both can get these needs met by spending time alone or with friends who share similar interests. This isn’t an indication that something is missing in your relationship. Remember, it’s rare for couples to be highly compatible in *all* areas of their relationship.

Marriage Preparation: Questions that become hurdles to commitment:

1. Any question(s) that seeks *absolute* certainty about your partner or the relationship.

We take comfort in certainty, in knowing how life is going to turn out—however, certainty is an illusion. If there is anything certain about life or relationships, it's that neither can offer any guarantees.

"Education is the path from cocky ignorance to miserable uncertainty." ~Mark Twain

While it's important to examine your motives (and your partner's motives) for wanting to spend the rest of your lives together (and take the necessary steps to prepare for marriage), at some point you need to stop spinning your wheels and realize there are things over which you have little control. That's where acceptance and patience come into the picture. Talk with your partner about how to appreciate each other's differences and accept that there are beauty and wisdom in these differences.

With the proper relationship tools and with a unified commitment, you and your partner will *co-create* a meaningful relationship.

2. Any question(s) that makes you feel superior and ultimately places your partner in a one-down position.

When your expectations about your relationship aren't met, it's easy to move into the "blame-the-other-for-being-a-lousy-spouse/partner" mindset. When you and your partner share similar expectations about the relationship (and acknowledge any differing expectations that may exist or arise between you), the relationship is placed on solid footing.

One question that stems from potentially damaging expectations is: "Will s/he make me *happy*?"

Of course you want to experience happiness in your marriage/relationship, but when the goal of your relationship is happiness in and of itself, it's wise to examine your expectations before you land in the inevitable puddle of hurt and disappointment. (And remember, other people don't have the power to make us happy—ultimately, that power is within us.)

Ultimately, your marriage/relationship should complement who you are, should bring out the best in each of you. The "you" that emerges in your marriage or relationship needs to stand on the shoulders of the "you" that already existed prior to the relationship—the person you were before your partner entered your life. This will allow intimacy to act as a catalyst that will heighten all that exists within you.

Conclusion:

If you're reading this, you obviously realize the importance in preparing for one of the most important decisions you'll ever make: to get married or enter into an exclusive, committed long-term relationship. As you take the steps necessary to prepare for all the joys and challenges that lie ahead, remember that if it's a search for certainty that you're after, you'll need to shift your focus and learn to tolerate (and even appreciate) the ambiguity that is a part of the romance puzzle.