

Building a Successful Long-term Relationship: Issues to Discuss With Your Partner

Posted Jul 22, 2016

When two people are newly in love, they may think they have met the person who is perfect for them. They have fun on dates and stay up late talking. They don't worry about how the other person manages the day to day: paying bills, caring for family members, losing a job, and so on.

They may see something in their partner that they don't like, but think that they can change it or that their partner will change it. Or, even though they know their partner is different from them, they might assume they have the same values.

Before entering into marriage or a lifelong commitment with another person, it's necessary to discuss key issues that can cause problems.

How to have the discussion

It can be helpful to have a list of questions or prompts that each person has thought about ahead of time.

The kind of response you get from your partner will depend on your tone of voice and facial expression. Try to stay open-minded and curious.

The attitude behind the question is also important. Leading questions can trap someone. "You do believe in spending time with family, don't you?" is very different than "Where do you want to spend the holidays?"

If you are comfortable, you can have the conversation just the two of you. If you run into a few areas that cause stress or that you can't accept, consider premarital counseling.

Goal for the discussion

The goal is to lay the groundwork for honest talks throughout your partnership and to have an understanding of each other's values. You want to have balance and compromise. Think "This is who you are and this is who I am. How can we make this work?"

Communication skills and conflict resolution

The better you communicate, the better the union. Still there are going to be some storms in any relationship. It's important to know how the two of you will handle times you disagree.

Ask each other:

- How do you act in an argument or when you are under stress? Do you avoid it? Shut down? Want to talk about it? Yell?
- When we are having an argument, how can we make sure it doesn't get out of control?
- After the argument is over, how can we forgive each other and move on?

Discuss what the signs will be that you have a problem the two of you can't handle. If that time comes, have a plan. Will you each talk to a friend who is not involved? Are you OK with seeing a couple's therapist or advisor? Write the plan down.

Children and roles in the home

Many people discuss whether they want to have kids and how many. But they don't discuss how far they are willing to go to create a family or how the children will be raised.

Ask each other:

- How important is it to have kids?
- Would you consider adoption? Fertility treatments? Surrogacy?
- How would you discipline the kids?
- Do you want religion to be a part of their lives? If so, which one and how much?

When people get married, they can share the child care and housework. Usually, though, there are still roles that form. Be clear about what you expect from each other and how you are going to manage that.

Ask each other:

- Do we see ourselves both working full time? Will one of us stay home or work part time?
- How will we divide chores? Child care?

In-laws

When new couples are making their own traditions and building their lives, the families they grew up in can interfere because they are scared of losing their son or brother, their daughter or sister.

Ask each other:

- What are our limits with our families?
- What will we do if one family member dislikes the other or one of us?
- Where do we want to spend holidays?
- How can we make sure our marriage and family come first?
- What new traditions can we start that are our own?

Friends and trust

As much as you love your partner, it's healthy to keep your own separate friends, interests, and hobbies. Be honest about what you are doing and who you are spending time with or jealousy can grow. It's also important to be honest about your sexual needs.

Ask each other:

- Can you support my hobbies even if you aren't interested in them?
- Can we socialize without each other?
- Is it OK to see friends of the opposite sex socially without each other?
- What are our sexual limits? Or what is off-limits with each other and with other people?
- What are your fantasies?
- How do you feel about pornography?

Couples can be shy about discussing this. Avoiding it can lead to hurt feelings and miscommunication. A little awkwardness is better than a lot of unhappiness.

Life goals and finances

It's important to understand each other's goals. For example, is one of you a go-getter who wants each person to make as much money as possible while the other one wants to take it easy and enjoy life? The two of you want to be moving in the same direction.

Ask each other:

- Where do we want to live?
- How do we want to grow? What are our thoughts about our future together?
- What do you value?

Finances are important in this discussion because how you want to spend your money shows your interests, hobbies, material values, and fears.

Ask each other:

- Do we want separate or joint checking, savings, and retirement funds?
- How much debt do you usually carry on your credit card? How do you usually pay it off?
- What do you typically spend your money on?

After the discussion

Life is constant change. Be sure to re-address areas as they come up. Remember the phrase "marriage takes work" and dedicate time to learn about relationships and marriage—whether it's a book, articles, or counseling. Maintain your marriage like you would maintain a car and there will be fewer major breakdowns.

Resources

The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts by Gary Chapman. Northfield Publishing, 2015.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman and Nan Silver. Harmony Books, 2015.

The New Rules of Marriage: What You Need to Know to Make Marriage Work by Terrence Real. Ballentine Books, 2008.

Bader, Elyn. "Super Negotiating for Couples." The Couples Institute.
www.couplesinstitute.com/super-negotiating-for-couples-tx/

By Jennifer Brick

©2016-2017 Beacon Health Options

Call:
877-694-9281

© 2017 Beacon Health Options, Inc.

<https://www.achievesolutions.net/achievesolutions/en/tisdkaty/>