



PREPARING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

Whether you are planning a small wedding with a simple service, or a large one with very elaborate arrangements, you will probably spend a lot of time and effort getting ready for the great event. If you are like most people who get married, the time and attention you must give to the details of the wedding will tempt you to neglect your preparations for the marriage. It's hard to remember that the wedding, while important, is only a few brief moments in a marriage that is meant to last a lifetime.

Attached is a list of marriage discussion starters. It is not required to go through this list before meeting with you, if you have time, but it may provoke some helpful discussion in our pre-marital session. If you're not able to look at it before the wedding, feel free to keep this and use it for the future sharing and growing of your marriage.

If you are both free and easy talkers who readily put deep feelings and important ideas into words, this will be more fun than work. If one or both of you find it difficult to identify or describe your feelings, experiences, preferences, and concerns, you will have to work a little harder, but your marriage is worth it! If either of you is someone who usually expresses things in "twenty-five words or less", you might want to purchase a 3-minute egg timer sand glass and agree that you will talk about every item listed for at least three minutes each. (Don't try to do all of them in one sitting. Unless you are having too good a conversation to break it up, limit yourself to an hour or so a time). As you talk through these things, be sure to tell each other any time you learn something about one another you didn't know before. Also, share any new insights or feelings that come to you as a result of talking together.

Feel free to contact me at any time either of you might like a conversation with me as a result of your marriage preparation conversations with each other. Please remember that I have an abiding interest in the welfare of your marriage and family. If you need support or encouragement at any time in the future, I hope you will contact me. I'm always ready to listen and will gladly help you in any way I can.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION DISCUSSION STARTERS

Page 1

Section #1 “Who we **are** includes who we **were** and who we **came from**.”

1. Each of you talk about three things you liked best about the family you grew up in, and three things about growing up in that family that were most difficult or painful for you.
2. Describe what you were like as a child. Talk about some important ways you are the same as that and some important ways you are different from that now that you are an adult.
3. What things about your parents’ marriage seem like good things that you’d like to include in your own marriage? If there are any things about your parents’ marriage and family life you particularly want to avoid what are those things?
4. Try to identify something about your past experience in life that has helped make you better prepared for marriage than you would have been otherwise. If there is anything from your past experience of life that you have had to overcome or that you still must work on in preparation for marriage, try to describe that, also.
5. As sensitively and as candidly as you are able, talk with one another about any significant personal relationships you have had, either with a dear friend or with a former love interest. What have your prior relationships taught you about yourself and about being deeply involved with another person?

Section #2 “I love you because...”

6. What was it about each other that you first found attractive?
7. If you had to describe your fiancée to someone he or she had never met, what would you say?
8. List some of his or her qualities that caused you to know this was the person you wanted to be with for the rest of your life.
9. Is there anything about how your fiancée is, or how your fiancée is toward you, that you wish were different?

MARRIAGE PREPARATION DISCUSSION STARTERS

Page 2

10. Are there some things you so appreciate and admire about your fiancée that you wish you could be more that way yourself?

Section #3 “There’ll Be Some Changes Made!”

11. List at least three things that you are really looking forward to about the way marriage will change your life.
12. List some things about married life that might be difficult changes or adjustments for you. Also list any things you think might be difficult adjustments for your fiancée that he or she hasn’t identified.
13. When important decisions must be made in your relationship, what has been your customary process for coming to a decision and carrying out what you've agreed to? Is there anything about the way you two have been making decisions or following through with them that you would like to change?
14. When you disagree, how do you customarily resolve the disagreement? After resolving past disagreements, have you usually come away from that feeling good about how you both handled it?
15. Almost every committed relationship must occasionally weather a serious quarrel. If you’ve ever had a really angry encounter with each other: How did you protect yourself? Did each of you exercise restraint so as not to inflict serious emotional wounds, or was it a “win at any cost” confrontation? How did you go about making up and getting beyond the anger and hurt? Take time now to list some ground rules for handling any future quarrels. After the next quarrel, rate how well you stuck to them.

Section #4 “Money Matters.”

16. If you haven’t yet agreed on a family budget, you would be well advised to do so. Considering your current combined income, savings, debts, and estimated living expenses, will your early years of marriage be a financial strain, or are finances pretty well in hand and likely to remain so?
17. Are you by nature: a) free-spending and relatively unconcerned about money matters; b) extremely thrifty, cautious, reluctant to spend, and very conscious of finances; or c) interested in value and financially responsible, but not really tight with money? Are you and your fiancée alike or different in this respect? How and by whom will finances be managed?

MARRIAGE PREPARATION DISCUSSION STARTERS

Page 3

18. Will your household be financed by one spouse's income, or will both of you need to be earning? Do you have a plan for sharing fairly the workload of household chores (and later, child-rearing) if both of you work outside the home?
19. Do you have a plan to save for a home, for expenses of raising a family, for retirement, etc.?
20. What do you see as the biggest financial hurdles you face in the next five years?

Section #5 "Intimacy and Sexuality"

21. Some people mistakenly think that intimacy is all about sexual activity, and that sexual activity is primarily a physical act. Describe to each other what you hope for in relating intimately with one another. Try to say "What I need from you is..." and "What I want to offer you is..."
22. Establish some ground rules for communicating to each other your ongoing (and changeable) needs for emotional support, affection, physical contact that is not specifically "sexual foreplay," and for lovemaking of all kinds.
23. No matter what you've done, seen in the movies, or read about, don't assume that either of you is an expert on sex. Don't assume that you have equal knowledge, comfort, and confidence about your own personal sexuality or about relating sexually with each other. Spend some time talking about any particular likes, dislikes, desires, or discomfort either of you knows you have or expects that you might have about relating sexually with one another.
24. One's comfort and confidence in sexual interaction can be hindered by body image, self-esteem, family upbringing, past sexual experience or inexperience, and the pressure of wanting to please one's spouse or wanting to live up to the expectations laid on us by a highly sexualized culture. If you are aware of such a hindrance for yourself, talk about those feelings with one another.
25. Both of you would do well to have a thorough and recent health examination by a physician. If there is any chance you might have any serious health problem, including a sexually transmitted disease, you owe it to yourself and to each other to have proper diagnostic testing and treatment. Unless you have decided that you are ready to have children right away, ask your physician to help you choose the safest and most effective means of birth control appropriate for you.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION DISCUSSION STARTERS

Page 4

Section #6 “When the Bride and Groom Become Mom and Dad”

26. By now you will probably have talked about whether you plan to have children, how soon, how many, and how much of an interval between. Have you come to agreement on these things? If not, how and when do you plan to resolve the unresolved questions?
27. If you have decided not to have children at all, make sure you have talked about how (or whether) you will share that decision with family members or friends. If you think you want children in the future, but not right away, talk about how you think you will know when the time is right to start having children. Also talk about how you might respond if one of you later has a change of heart on when or whether to have children, or if an unplanned pregnancy occurs. If you plan to start having children very soon, talk about how you will make sure your growth as a couple will not take a back seat to your role as parents. If you desire children but are not able to have them, what options might appeal to you?
28. What do you expect will be three or four exciting things about becoming parents? What are three or four special challenges or difficulties do you think parenting will present to you? If you are blending two existing families, what special problems and possibilities do you foresee?
29. Identify the standards and values you want to offer your children. Your list might include: Love & Affection ; Time & Attention; Guidance & Discipline; Health & Safety; Education; Athletics; Spiritual Growth; TV & Leisure Time; Family Mealtime; Contact With Grandparents & Extended Family, etc. Talk about how you will see that these values are taught and honored in your home.
30. In our culture the burdens of child-rearing and maintaining family life still rest most heavily on mothers, even though fathers generally take more responsibility than prior generations have. Talk about what you expect of yourself and what you will expect of your spouse to help share that load.

Section #7 “Spirituality and Religion”

31. What does spirituality or personal faith mean in your life?
32. Why is it important for you to have clergy perform your ceremony as opposed to a justice of peace or notary?

MARRIAGE PREPARATION DISCUSSION STARTERS

Page 5

33. How do you cultivate your own personal spiritual life?
34. How can you and your new spouse cultivate your spiritual lives together?
35. What are the differences and similarities in your religious lives that present challenges and opportunities for you?

Section #8 “Last, But Not Least”

36. When you marry you will make a promise of absolute and exclusive faithfulness to each other for as long as you live. How do you plan to keep that promise? What might make it difficult to keep?
37. If the stress and problems of marriage begin to overwhelm you, what sources of support and help are available to you?
38. Every family has traditions, expectations, and peculiarities. A married couple has roots in two family trees, and must find a way to accommodate to both. Are there any such concerns specific to your family situation that are worth talking about?
39. Keeping in touch and growing together through the years is essential to a healthy married couple. What strengths do the two of you have in communicating needs and feelings with each other that you want to be sure to keep using? What are some potential communication weaknesses or obstacles that you need to work on?
40. The best way to communicate is with honest, loving, straight talk. But we're not always able to do that well when we need to the most. It's not fair to expect your spouse to read your mind, but are there some signals that will give a clue? What non-verbal clues might tell your fiancée when you are experiencing the following:

ANGER, JEALOUSY, BOREDOM, SADNESS, ANXIETY, INSECURITY, GUILT OVERLOAD, DEPRESSION, DISAPPOINTMENT (add your own to the list).