

QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH OTHER BEFORE MARRIAGE.

When it comes to marriage, what you don't know really *can* hurt you.

Whether because of shyness, lack of interest or a desire to preserve romantic mystery, many couples do not ask each other the difficult questions that can help build the foundation for a stable marriage.

In addition to wanting someone with whom they can raise children and build a secure life, those considering marriage now expect their spouses to be both best friend and confidant. These romantic-comedy expectations, in part thanks to Hollywood, can be difficult to live up to.

There are plenty of questions couples can ask each other early in the relationship to help ensure a good fit, but the great majority of couples don't.

If you don't deal with an issue before marriage, you deal with it while you're married. It can be hard to keep secrets decade after decade, and 'discretion' before the wedding can lead to disappointments down the line.

The following questions, intimate and sometimes awkward, are designed to spark honest discussions and possibly give couples a chance to spill secrets before it's too late.

a) Did your family throw plates, calmly discuss issues or silently shut down when disagreements arose?

As relationship's success is based on how differences are dealt with. As we are all shaped by our family's dynamic, this question will give you insight into whether your partner will come to mimic the conflict resolution patterns of his or her parents or avoid them.

b) Will we have children, and if we do, will you change diapers?

With the question of children, it is important to not just say what you think your partner wants to hear. Before marrying, couples should honestly discuss if they want children. How many do they want? At what point do they want to have them? And how do they imagine their roles as parents? Talking about birth-control methods before planning a pregnancy is also important.

c) Will our experiences with our exes help or hinder us?

Research suggests that having had many serious relationships before a marriage can pose a risk for divorce and lower marital quality. (This can be because of a person having more experience with serious breakups and potentially comparing a current partner unfavourably with past ones.) Raising these issues early on can help; people are hesitant to explicitly talk about their past and

can feel retroactively jealous or judgmental. The only real way to have those conversations in an intimate and productive way and loving way is to agree to accept that the other person had a life before the couple.

d) How important is religion? How will we celebrate religious holidays, if at all?

If two people come from different religious backgrounds, is each going to pursue his or her own religious affiliation? Couples need honest discussion around this issue. Spouses are especially likely to experience conflict over religious traditions when children are added to the mix. If the couple decide to have children, they must ask how the children's religious education will be handled. It is better to have a plan.

e) Is my debt your debt? Would you be willing to bail me out?

It's important to know how your partner feels about financial self-sufficiency and whether he or she expects you to keep your resources separate. Disclosing debts is very important. Equally, if there is a serious discrepancy between your income and your partner's, it is recommended to create a basic budget according to proportional incomes. Many couples fail to discuss sharing finances, though it is crucial.

f) What's the amount you would be willing to spend on a car, a couch, shoes?

Couples should make sure they are on the same page in terms of financial caution or recklessness. Buying a car can be a great indicator. Couples can also frame this question around what they spend reckless amounts of money on.

g) Can you deal with my doing things without you?

Going into marriage, many people hope to keep their autonomy in certain areas of their life at the same time they are building a partnership with their spouse. This means they may be unwilling to share hobbies or friends, and this can lead to tension and feelings of rejection if it isn't discussed. Couples may also have different expectations as to what "privacy" means and that should be discussed, too. Important to ask your partner when he or she most needs to be alone.

h) Do we like each other's parents?

As long as you and your partner present a united front, having a bad relationship with your in-laws can be manageable. But if a spouse is not willing to address the issue with his or her parents, it can bode very poorly for the long-term health of the relationship. At the same time, considering the strengths and weaknesses of your parents can help illuminate future patterns of attachment or distancing in your own relationship.

i) How important is sex to you?

Couples today expect to remain sexually excited by their spouse, an expectation that did not exist in the past. A healthy relationship will include discussion of what partners enjoy about sex as well as how often they expect to have it. If people are looking to experience different things through sex — pleasure versus feeling young, for example — some negotiation may be required to ensure both partners remain satisfied.

j) How far should we take flirting with other people? Is watching pornography O.K.?

Couples need to discuss their attitudes about pornography, flirting and expectations for sexual exclusivity. A couple's agreement on behaviour in this area can, and most likely will, change down the line, but it is good to set the tone early on so both partners are comfortable discussing it. Ideally, sexual exclusivity should be talked about in the same way as other day-to-day concerns, so that problems can be dealt with before a partner becomes angry. It is best to ask your partner outright for his or her views on pornography. Couples are often too scared to ask about this early in the relationship, it can frequently become a point of tension down the line.

k) Do you know all the ways I say "I love you"?

Gary Chapman's 1992 book, "The 5 Love Languages," introduced a means of categorizing expressions of love to strengthen a marriage. This is an excellent book for couples to read, The 5 love languages are (in alphabetical order) : acts of service , affirmation, physical touch. quality time and receiving gifts. It is important that each learn their own primary and secondary love language and that of their partner and discuss them in detail. The couple needs to work out how to nurture the relationship, in a way specific to them.

What do you admire about me, and what are your pet peeves?

Can you imagine the challenges ever outweighing the admiration? If so, what would you do? Anne Klaeyen, a leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, said that couples rarely consider that second question. Ideally, marriage is a life commitment, she said, and it's not enough to just "click together," as many couples describe their relationship. A marriage must go deeper than that original "click."

How do you see us 10 years from now?

Keeping the answer to this question in mind can help a couple deal with current conflict as they work toward their ultimate relationship goals, according to Mr. Eisenberg.

Dr. Wilcox said this discussion could also be an opportunity to raise the question of whether each partner will consider divorce if the relationship deteriorates, or whether they expect marriage to be for life, come what may.