



# *What Do You Expect?*

Research-based Questions to Build Knowledge, Trust, and Intimacy

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When it comes to marriage or a highly committed relationship, I believe partners should go into those relationships with their “eyes wide open.” In order to be truly intimate with your partner, it is important that they know you as completely as possible—your past experiences, triumphs, challenges, goals, and current expectations. In fact, noted scholar and researcher, Dr. Blaine Fowers has said that most marital dissolution is a result of disappointed or unmet expectations. There is nothing wrong with having expectations but problems can occur if those expectations are unrealistic or not discussed beforehand.

As a therapist, researcher, and educator, I have heard too many stories from clients, research participants, and students who have found out things about their partner that they wish they would have known before they got married. In other words, ignorance is not bliss. While surprises are often fun in relationships, unexpected revelations can be harmful to relationships and are better disclosed before you marry. As such, about four years ago, I began “collecting” questions that I saw come up in therapy, class, or through other circumstances in my life and in the lives of others. Although many of these questions are geared towards couples who are not yet married, many of these topics are still very much applicable to highly committed and married couples.

One of the goals of this book is to help you answer the question, “How well do I really know my partner?” Dr. Jeff Larson, an excellent scholar and therapist who specializes in the area of premarital factors that predict future marital satisfaction, claims that couples who do the best are those who have a significant depth of knowledge about their partner as well as a breadth of experiences with them. Study after study has found that the longer you know someone and the more you know about them, the greater your likelihood of future marital satisfaction. It’s that simple...well kind of.

The research also tells us that having high and positive expectations of your partner and your marriage leads to greater marital happiness. Consequently, I hope that you are headed into this significant commitment with a sense of optimism and excited anticipation. Marriage is a wonderful institution where some of our deepest joys and triumphs are experienced. Nevertheless, the research has shown that individuals with “unrealistic” or “overly romanticized” expectations tend to struggle and some even end their marriage when expectations are not met.

While it is impossible to anticipate and discuss every single detail in one’s life or relationship, there are certain areas and questions that are particularly important to discuss. What follows is a list of some of those vital questions. It is understood that you might not be able to answer all of these questions at the current stage of your relationship. Or, if you are already married or have been dating for a significant length of time, it is likely that you have already addressed many of these topics.

Some of the questions are meant to induce discussion and others are just fun topics that are designed to help you simply learn more about each other.

As you go through these questions, I strongly recommend that you be completely honest in your responses. Anything less could (and most likely will) bring frustration later on. However, be cautious as some questions and/or answers might bring up uncomfortable thoughts or emotions. Therefore, if you are in a highly committed relationship or are already married, make sure you are prepared for some discomfort as it is possible that not all answers will be to your expectations or liking. If you are not willing or ready to discuss some of these questions, you may need to address your hesitancy in and of itself. In addition, if you have any significant “secrets” that you have not yet shared with your partner, this may be the right opportunity to do so as long as there is a great amount of trust and emotional safety in your relationship.

Before you begin, it’s necessary to identify how, when, and with whom these questions should be discussed. First, these are not necessarily “get-to-know-you” questions to be used in a budding relationship. Rather these questions were written for those individuals who are in an established, committed relationship, and have spent a significant amount of time together, building high amounts of trust, openness, and honesty. Individuals in a freshly established relationship may “sugar coat” their answers for fear of offending or scaring off their new partner, therefore preventing you from getting real and genuine perspectives.

Second, these questions should be discussed in privacy and in a setting where you are both comfortable sharing your thoughts. In addition, confidentiality is essential so none of what you share should be passed on to friends or family unless there is a potential for harm to you or your partner. If any issue does arise that needs to be discussed with another person outside of the relationship, it is best if it is agreed upon by both partners.

Third, these questions are intended to make your expectations known and understood and to give you and your partner an opportunity to know each other better and on a deeper level. The answers to these questions are not meant to create some sort of contract that is now written in stone. It is understood that people and relationships change and develop over time and that what is discussed today might change ten years from now. However, while circumstances and opinions can change over time, hopefully your shared core beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors won’t change drastically.

Finally, some of these questions require a deep amount of openness and vulnerability. If you do not feel emotionally (or physically) safe with your partner, I would encourage you to seek professional help for yourself and/or your relationship before you increase your commitment or decide to marry. Emotionally safe relationships have the qualities of trust, forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, and love. Individual partners should create a place of security and acceptance within the relationship.



That doesn't mean that they will be "okay" with all of your answers or that the relationship won't end based on some of your responses; however, it does mean that they won't criticize, belittle, or dismiss what you share.

As you begin this journey of discovery with your partner, I would encourage you not to go through all of these questions in one sitting. I would suggest that you take one or two general topics over the next several weeks. Some couples use these questions at the end of a date as a way to just relax and be together. These topics and questions are not in any particular order of importance. Further, this is a dynamic document that I am regularly making changes to. If you have any suggestions, please submit them on my website.

Couples that have used this questionnaire report that it was one of the most helpful strategies they've come across and that it really deepened their love and bond with one another. It is my hope that this exercise will do the same for you, increasing the level of emotional intimacy, trust, and knowledge you have both about yourself and your relationship.

Thank you and enjoy the journey!

- Jeremy S. Boden, Ph.D

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# Healthy Marriage

1. What do you believe creates a healthy and satisfying marriage?
2. What personal characteristics do you see as most important in a healthy marriage?
3. Tell me about someone whom you admire and why.
4. Can you think of two couples you know personally who you would say have a really great and healthy marriage?
  - a. What is it about their relationship that you see as healthy and that you'd like to have in ours?
  - b. What individual characteristics do each of them have that contributes to a healthy relationship?
5. Why do you believe some marriages make it and others don't?
6. After we are married, according to your definition, what would qualify as a "date"?
  - a. How often do you expect us to go out on dates after we are married?
  - b. Do you enjoy double dates with our friends or do you (will you) expect to have more dates with just us?
7. What is your expectation about remembering birthday, anniversaries, or other significant dates?
8. How would you define love when it comes to a romantic relationship?
9. What is romantic for you?
  - a. What are some of your expectations of me when it comes to romance?
10. What does commitment mean to you?
  - a. If someone were committed to a marriage, what would they be doing? What would they not be doing?
  - b. Do you feel like you can leave the dating scene at this point in your life?
11. If our relationship struggles to the point that we need outside help, will you be supportive of marital therapy and going together?
12. Would you be open and supportive of reading relationship books and going to relationship workshops to strengthen our relationship?
13. Besides our love and attraction for each other, how do you feel about our friendship?

- a. Do you feel like we are really good friends?
- b. Is there a difference between our friendship and the friendship you have with other people?
- c. What are some things we could do to strengthen our marital friendship?

## Getting Married and Our Relationship

- I. Why are we getting married? (Note: If the primary reason is pregnancy, financial security, loneliness, or to get away from your family, because all of your friends are getting married, or because of religious expectations, these may not be sufficient reasons to get married.)
2. Tell me why you want to marry me (or increase our level of commitment)?
  - a. What is it about me that “pushed you over the edge” to want to marry me?
3. Thinking back to when we first met, what is that you remember about me that was most attractive?
4. How do you think our relationship will change after we get married?
5. What parts of our marriage do you anticipate will be the best?
6. What parts of our marriage do you anticipate might be challenging?
7. Do you feel like we have taken enough time in our dating relationship to really get to know each other?
8. Even the happiest marriages take a lot of work and sacrifice. Do you feel like you are ready for the level of commitment that a marriage requires?
  - a. If yes, what about you and our relationship, brings you to that conclusion?
9. What is your “Love Language” and how do you expect me to “speak” your “Love Language?”
10. How do you think our relationship with our mutual and/or separate friends will change after we are married?
  - a. Do you expect to spend as much, more, or less time with your friends?
11. What are some of your thoughts about going to premarital counseling? Do you think it would be helpful in any way as we prepare for our life together?

# Family Background, Growing up, and Attachment

## *Family Background and Growing up*

1. What was one of your favorite memories while growing up?
2. Overall, what was your childhood like?
  - a. Pick three words to describe your childhood and why.
  - b. If you could change anything about your childhood, what would it be?
  - c. What was your relationship like with your mother/father? What is it like now?
3. Was your family affectionate?
4. What are some of your family's greatest strengths?
5. What are some of your family's greatest challenges?
6. What do you love about your family?
7. What do you not like about your family? (e.g., the way they resolve conflict)
8. When it comes to your parents,
  - a. What did/do you like about your parents' marriage that you would like to emulate in our relationship?
  - b. What did/do you dislike about your parents' marriage?
  - c. How did your mother treat your father?
  - d. How did your father treat your mother?
  - e. Who was the main decision maker?
    - i. How do you see that playing out in our marriage?
9. In what ways are you most like your father? In what ways are you different?
  - a. What positive traits from your father would you like to carry on in yourself?
  - b. Are there any not so positive personality traits you have learned from your father that might be detrimental to you or to our relationship?

10. In what ways are you most like your mother? In what ways are you different?
  - a. What positive traits from your mother would you like to carry on in yourself?
  - b. Are there any not so positive personality traits you have learned from your mother that might be detrimental you or to our relationship?
11. What traditions would you like to keep from your family of origin?
  - a. How did your family celebrate birthdays?
    - i. What do you expect your birthdays to be like? Gifts, dining out, vacations, pampered?
  - b. Did your family tend to eat meals together or separately?
    - i. If we decide to have children, what is your expectation of meal time and togetherness?
    - ii. Should families watch TV together when they are eating dinner?
12. If your parents really struggled in their marriage, had a lot of conflict, didn't connect very well, or even divorced,
  - a. What was the hardest part for you growing up in that atmosphere?
  - b. How old were you when you experienced some of the conflict and/or the break-up of their marriage?
  - c. How do you think it has affected you personally, your relationship with yourself, and others?
  - d. How do you think it has affected you in romantic relationships?
  - e. How do think it will affect our relationship as romantic partners?
13. How did your parents discipline you and your siblings?
14. Is there any history of emotional or psychological disorders in your family (e.g., depression, anxiety, addictions, etc.)?
15. Are there any "family secrets" (e.g., dad addicted to prescription pills, suicide, physical abuse) that would be important for me to know about?
16. What role (e.g., the responsible one, scapegoat, etc.) did you play in your family?
  - a. Do you play that same role now that you are an adult or has it changed? If so, in what way?
17. Would you say your family was strict or a little lax when it comes to cleanliness around the house?
  - a. What is your expectation for us in our home?

18. When your family is just hanging out, what do they tend to talk about?
19. Some families struggle to talk openly about religion, money, politics, sex, etc. What topics were difficult for your family to talk about?
  - a. Has any of that changed now that you are an adult?
  - b. Are these topics difficult for you to talk about now?
20. Who among your siblings would you say you are the closest to?
21. Who among your siblings would you say you are the least closest to?
22. Which sibling do you tend to have the most conflict with?
  - a. What tends to cause the most conflict?
23. Is there anything I should know about to help me get along with your family better?
24. How did your family and individual family members handle stress?
  - a. Can you think of a time when your family was in a very stressful situation and they didn't handle it in a very healthy manner? What did they do? Looking back, what could they have done differently?
  - b. Can you think of a very stressful event or time in your family when they handled it really well? What did they do?
25. How did your family manage anger and frustration?
  - a. Was there name calling, yelling, physical violence, etc.?
  - b. How do you tend to handle anger and frustration?
  - c. Can you think of a time where your family had an intense conflict and it was handled really well?
  - d. How did your family repair from hurt feelings or conflict?
26. How did your family manage emotions such as sadness, fear, loneliness?
  - a. Did individuals in your family feel free to openly talk about feelings or was the expression of emotions dismissed, minimized, punished, or did your family tend to "brush them under the rug"?
27. Is there any event, dynamic, or circumstance from when you were growing up that you feel was never resolved properly or that you haven't come to terms with?

- a. Do you hold any resentment or ill feelings towards any member of your family?
    - i. If so, is this something you feel the need to resolve?
      1. What might be the best way to go about this and how can I be supportive to you?
28. If you could go back to any time in your early years (ages 3-10), when would that be and why?
- a. What advice would you give yourself at that time?
29. If you could back to any time in your adolescent years (ages 11-18), when would it be and why?
- a. What advice would you give yourself at that time?

*Attachment* (Questions used by permission by Dr. Scott Woolley)

30. Thinking back to when you were growing up and times when you were sad, lonely, embarrassed, scared, how did you seek comfort?
- a. Do you feel like you could always count on this person (or people) to be there for you and to provide comfort?
  - b. How did you let this person (or people) know that you needed comfort?
  - c. Did this person (or people) ever betray you or were they unavailable at crucial times?
  - d. What did you learn about comfort and connection from this person (or people)?
  - e. If you did not seek comfort from others, how did you comfort yourself?
    - i. When people were unsafe, what did that look like?
  - f. Did you ever turn to drugs, alcohol, sex, or other things for comfort?

## Gender Roles and Household Labor

1. Growing up, were there chores that were deemed “girl’s work” or “boy’s work”?
2. What is your expectation on the level of cleanliness of our house/apartment?
  - a. On a scale of 1-10, what is your level of priority to have a clean house?
  - b. Whose responsibility is it to maintain that level?

3. Are you willing to clean the toilet, do the dishes, change diapers, and clean up kids vomit or *my* vomit?
  - a. Is there anything around the house that you refuse to do (e.g., dishes)?
4. Who is going to shop for groceries, prepare meals, do the yard work, do laundry?
  - a. How might these responsibilities change once we have children?
5. What does it mean to you to work as a team?
6. Do you expect to do household chores together (e.g., we are doing dishes together) or separately (e.g., I'm in one room vacuuming and you are in the other room mopping)?
7. When it comes to gender roles and how people carry those out, what are your expectations of me as a wife/husband/partner?

## Physical Health

1. What are your personal goals to stay physically healthy throughout our relationship?
2. Do you enjoy exercise?
  - a. If so, what is your favorite way to exercise?
3. Do you expect me to exercise regularly?
  - a. If so, how often do you expect to exercise?
4. What do you expect as far as eating healthy?
5. What are your beliefs and opinions about natural supplements, vitamins, herbs?
6. Were there any significant health issues in your family background?
7. Do you have any significant health challenges that I should be aware of?
8. When do you usually go to bed?
  - a. What time would like to go to bed?
  - b. Do you expect to go to bed at the same time?
  - c. What time do you expect to get up in the morning?
  - d. Do you expect me to wake up with you?

## Abuse and Violence

1. Have you ever hit or been violent towards someone?
  - a. If so, how many people, who, why?
  - b. How often has this happened?
2. Do you have any kind of criminal record?
3. Have you ever been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused either as an adult or as a child? (A word of caution, if you have had any of these experiences this can be a very sensitive subject and should only be discussed with a partner who is emotionally and physically safe. Further, if you do decide to disclose this part of your past, it may be appropriate to do so with a qualified mental health professional.)

## Finances

1. What does money mean to you?
  - a. Does it symbolize something for you?
  - b. What stresses you out when it comes to money?
2. Did your parents ever talk to you about money? If so, what did they teach you?
  - a. Tell me about your parent's philosophy on money and how they manage, save, and spend money?
    - i. What do you expect to do the same and differently than your parents when it comes to money?
3. Have you ever had a personal financial budget?
4. What are some of your thoughts and feelings about debt?
  - a. What kind of debt are you comfortable with?
  - b. Are there any legitimate reasons for people to go into debt?
  - c. Have you disclosed all of your personal debt to me?
  - d. What kind of debt do you have?

- e. What are your thoughts about credit card debt?
5. Would you consider yourself to be a spender or a saver?
6. Would you consider yourself to be a risk taker or a security seeker when it comes to money?
7. When it comes to investing money, would you say you are conservative or aggressive?
8. Have you ever lost a large amount of money on an investment of any kind?
9. Do you think paying the bills should be done separately or together?
10. What does it mean to you to be “financially faithful?”
11. What are your ultimate financial goals?
12. What are *our* financial goals?
  - a. How much do you expect to make during our first year, fifth year, tenth year, and twentieth year of marriage?
13. Should we consider entering into a prenuptial agreement?
14. If there was a time that we could not get ahold of each other to discuss a purchase, what amount of money would you feel comfortable with me spending?
15. What is your definition of “wealth”?
16. Do you want to be on and/or create a budget?
17. How often do you expect to eat at restaurants?
18. Do you expect to give to charitable organizations?
19. Should we have joint or separate bank accounts?
20. How important is planning for retirement to you?
  - a. What are our plans for a retirement fund?
21. Do you want to rent or own our home?
22. What is the most expensive item you have ever purchased?
23. What kind of cars do you expect to drive throughout our life together?

## Career and Educational Goals

1. Who do you expect to be the primary “bread winner” in our family? Will it be both of us?
  - a. Do you have a clear plan of what you want for a career? If so, what is it?
  - b. If it is me, how much money do you expect me to make each year?
  - c. How much money do you expect me to make so that you would feel financially secure or comfortable?
2. What would be your absolute dream job or career?
3. What are your general thoughts about education?
4. Are you supportive of either one of us going into debt to get an education?
5. There may be a time when I would like to go back to school for further education. What are your thoughts about that? Will you be completely supportive?
6. What level of education do you expect to achieve?
7. Do you have any aspirations of owning your own business some day?
8. Are you comfortable with my level of ambition?
9. Some professions are very demanding. If one of us plans to be a doctor or other occupation that requires a lot time for school/training/establishing it may require that we live far away from family and friends for an extended period of time. Do you think you would be emotionally prepared for this transition and change?
  - a. What do think would be helpful for you to ease the change?
  - b. If we do pursue an extensive amount of education, it is likely that we will be on a tight budget for many years. Do you feel like you are prepared for this?
    - i. What can we do now and in the future to prepare for this likelihood?

## Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Habits

1. Thinking back to when you were growing up,
  - a. How did your parents' communication and conflict resolution work?
  - b. Did one of your parents tend to withdraw, get angrier, or instigate arguments more than the other?
  - c. Do you see yourself more like your mother or father when it comes to conflict?
  - d. How did your parents "repair" or come back together after a conflict or disagreement?
2. When it comes to apologizing and forgiveness,
  - a. How difficult is it for you to apologize (e.g., "I'm really sorry.") to people, past romantic partners, or me?
  - b. What does it look like for you when someone is sincerely sorry for what they did?
  - c. What qualifies as an apology for you? Does it depend on the situation?
  - d. Do you expect the words "I'm sorry" or do you expect something more (e.g., you have to do something to make up for the harm you have caused.)
  - e. What does forgiveness mean to you?
    - i. What does it look like?
    - ii. What does it *not* look like?
    - iii. Some people believe that to forgive, you have to also forget. Is that how you feel?
3. What does empathy mean to you?
  - a. In what ways do you see empathy play out in our relationship and marriage?
  - b. Can you think of a time that I was truly empathetic towards you?
4. What area of communication do you feel like you are really good at?
  - a. In what area of communication do you feel like you could use some work?
5. When people talk to you about their frustrations, do you tend to jump to giving them advice?

6. When you need comfort and reassurance from someone, what do you tend to do?
  - a. Do you feel safe to come to me and ask me directly or do you think that I “should just know”?
7. What do you tend to do when you get really angry or frustrated?
8. Would you say that, during an argument between us or with someone else, that you are good at taking the perspective of the other person?
9. When it comes to conflict and communication in *our* relationship,
  - a. How do you think we have done so far in our relationship when it comes to communication and conflict resolution?
  - b. How do you know when a conflict between us is over or resolved?
  - c. Obviously, all couples have conflict. What is your expectation of what will occur when we have a really big disagreement after we marry? What can we decide now that will help us when (not if) that happens?
  - d. What are some “ground rules” that we can decide on now when it comes to fighting? For example, some couples make a ground rule of no name calling or taking a “timeout.” What are our ground rules?
  - e. What is your expectation of how to resolve conflicts between us?
  - f. When you are mad, sad, or upset, what do you tend to do?
    - i. When you are experiencing these emotions, what would you prefer *me* to do?
  - g. Have you ever been nervous to tell me something and haven’t because you thought I would get upset or that I would break-up with you?
  - h. What does the saying, “pick your battles” mean to you?
  - i. What do you think are some of the biggest differences or incompatibilities between us?
    - i. What are some small differences or “minor” incompatibilities between us?
  - j. For some couples, after an argument or if their relationship experiences some challenges, there is sometimes a temptation for one (or both) partners to talk with friends and/or family about their frustrations. What are your thoughts about this?
    - i. Do you want to make a general rule about when or if this is ever an option?
    - ii. How might this create further strain on our relationship?

10. Are there any annoying habits that I do that you foresee as a potential problem?
11. How do you expect to handle the little annoying habits, mannerisms, issues that I might have (e.g., leaving clothes on the floor, biting nails, etc.)?
12. Do you swear? How do you feel about swearing? Do you anticipate swearing at or around me?

## Personal and Familial Boundaries

1. Do you need/want time alone?
2. How much of our own thoughts or feelings do you expect we should share with each other?
  - a. Do you expect me to share everything with you?
3. What is your expectation of doing things together? Apart?
  - a. Do you believe that we should do everything together?
  - b. Do you believe it's important to encourage some level of individual activities?
  - c. How much time do you see us spending together after we marry?
4. How do you feel about my friends?
  - a. Are there any of my friends that you don't feel comfortable around or just don't like?
  - b. Which of my friends do you enjoy the most?
  - c. How much time is appropriate to spend with friends, parents, or family members?
  - d. How would you feel if I had a "guy's night out" or a "girl's night out"?
    - i. What is your expected frequency of a "guy's night out" or "girl's night out"?
    - ii. What are appropriate and inappropriate activities?
    - iii. What are some of your thoughts on an extended trip (2 or more days) with friends?
5. How much time should be spent on outside activities such as sports, clubs, organizations, etc?
6. Are there any of your friends or family members who don't like me or don't want us to get married?
  - a. If so, what are some of their concerns?

- i. Do you feel like their concerns are legitimate?
  - b. What issue(s) of theirs do we need to address?
- 7. How do you feel about my family?
  - a. What kind of relationship do you foresee having with my family?
  - b. Do you like my family and parents?
  - c. What does my family and/or parents do to annoy you?
- 8. Is there any concern that your parents will interfere with our relationship in any way?
  - a. Sometime parents feel the need to give counsel and/or advice (especially about marriage, finances, and parenting). How do you feel about my parents or your parents doing this? Do you anticipate this?
- 9. If we live a good distance from my family, would you be comfortable if they stayed at our house when they come to visit?
  - a. If so, what amount of time would you feel comfortable with?
- 10. Do you expect to live near or far from your family or my family?
- 11. Do you think we will have scheduling challenges with your family during the holidays?
  - a. When and how often do you expect to visit our families?
- 12. Sometimes couples experience financial difficulties and they end up living with either partner's parents or family. Is there any circumstance under which you would consider us having to live with my parents or your parents?
  - a. What boundaries would we have to set if it ever came down to that?
- 13. What are your boundaries when it comes to the ratings of TV and movies?
  - a. Are there certain film or TV ratings (MA, R, PG-13, PG) that you don't like to watch?
- 14. Is there anything that you will be *unwilling* to give up when we get married?

# Physical and Sexual Intimacy

## *Physical Intimacy*

1. What are your expectations of physical intimacy or touch in our marriage?
2. Would you consider yourself a “touchy” or affectionate person?
3. Are you comfortable with our current level of physical affection?
  - a. Do you prefer more or less?
    - i. If less, what about the amount is uncomfortable?
    - ii. Is this going to be an ongoing issue in our relationship?
4. What is one of your favorite forms (hugging, hand holding, etc.) of physical intimacy to *give*?
5. What are a few of your favorite forms of physical intimacy to *receive*?
6. How do you feel about public displays of affection (e.g., holding hands, kissing, hugging, and/or sitting on laps)?
7. Would you be comfortable if, in a playful way, I squeezed your rear-end or touched other sexual parts of your body?

## *Sexual Intimacy*

1. What do you see as the *purpose(s)* sex should and will have in our relationship?
2. Growing up, what did your parents teach you about sexual intimacy?
3. Besides your home, where else did you learn about sexual intimacy?
4. What is it like now that you are older to discuss sex more openly?
5. Many individuals who have not engaged in sexual intimacy before pull many of their expectations about sex from movies or media. Is this true of you? Do you believe or expect our sexual intimacy to be like it is in the movies?
6. Have you ever been sexually intimate with another person?
7. For those who have been sexually active or had sexual experiences before meeting their partner:

- a. How do you feel about my sexual history?
  - b. Do you see our sexual history getting in the way of our sexual intimacy in our marriage?
  - c. Have you been tested for any sexually transmitted infections?
8. What level of sexual knowledge (i.e., how sex works, orgasm, arousal, etc.) do you believe you have?
- a. Are you open to reading some books about sexual intimacy before we get married or before we become sexually active?
9. What are your thoughts and feelings about your body?
- a. For many women, body image plays a significant role in frequency and quality of sexual intimacy, do you anticipate this in our marriage?
  - b. If you anticipate that it might be a potential issue later on, what can I do to help you feel more confident or content about your body?
  - c. Are you ok with undressing in front of me?
  - d. Do you think you will be comfortable undressing in front of me when our bodies begin to change (i.e., pregnancy, weight gain, natural aging, etc.)
10. How often do you expect to engage in sexual intimacy in our marriage?
- a. Do you think this frequency will change before or after we begin having children?
  - b. Do you anticipate this frequency changing as we get older and/or become busier?
11. For some couples, their sexual desire is quite high before the marriage (even if they are currently sexually active) but then one member of the partnership becomes less interested in sex soon after the wedding. Some frustrated spouses call this the “bait and switch.” Do you foresee this as a potential issue?
- a. If it does become an issue, what solutions do you foresee as options?
12. How and who do you expect to initiate sexual intimacy?
13. What happens when one of us is “in the mood” and the other is not?
- a. What is our plan for when this occurs?
14. What is your definition of “foreplay?”
15. What are some activities that you see would be “forbidden” in our sexual relationship?

16. Are you ok with “quickies” (i.e., bringing your partner to orgasm with little foreplay)?
17. If our sex life is not satisfactory to one or both of us, would you be supportive of seeking out help through books or a couples/sex therapist and going together?
18. Do you harbor any sexual fears or confusion about your sexual identity, orientation, or desires?
  19. Some couples use sex as a way to “get back at” their partner. This is obviously not an effective way to communicate your discontent with your partner. What are some ways we can avoid this potential strategy?
  20. Have you had a “premarital” exam by an OBGYN? (This questions is mostly aimed at women. Men can obviously see a physician before they become sexually active but this is usually only done if there is specific physiological or anatomical concern.)
21. As much as you can tell, what really puts you “in the mood”?
22. Do you feel “turned on” by me and do you feel sexually attracted to me?
23. Are there certain things that I do (or don’t do) that are a sexual “turn off” for you?
24. What is your opinion about masturbation?
25. Have you ever had or do you currently have a sexually transmitted infection?
26. Are you open to experimenting with different sexual positions, techniques, or toys?
27. For those who have decided to be sexually abstinent before their marriage, what are your expectations of our first sexual experience?
28. Are there any physical issues with your reproductive or sexual organs that would be important for me to know?
29. What was it like to go through these questions about our current or future sexual relationship?

## Other Forms of Intimacy

*(The conceptualization of other forms of intimacy comes from Dr. Charles Beckert.)*

### *Emotional Intimacy: Sharing personal thoughts and emotions with each other*

1. Do you feel safe to share some of your deeper emotional feelings, struggles, fears, or sadness with me?
2. Do you feel like you could be completely vulnerable and transparent with me?
3. Can you think of a time when you felt emotionally close to me?
4. What are some ways that we could instill more emotional closeness and safety in our relationship?

### *Recreational intimacy: Playing together*

1. Can you think of and describe times in our relationship when you had a really good time being and playing together.?
2. What are some things that you enjoy doing together that are relaxing or playful?
3. What are some ways that we can instill more recreational, fun, and playful activities in our relationship?

### *Spiritual Intimacy: Experiencing the Spirit together*

1. How would you describe the spiritual intimacy in our relationship?
2. Can you think of times where you have felt spiritually close to me?
3. What are some ways we can instill more spiritual intimacy into our relationship?

### *Creative Intimacy: Sharing acts of creation together*

1. What are some of the ways that you are creative?
2. What are some ways you see me as creative?
3. What are some ways that we can instill more creative activities in our relationship?

### *Conflict Intimacy: Facing and struggling with challenges and differences*

1. Have there been times in our relationship that, after we resolved a conflict, you felt closer to me?

2. Knowing that conflict is going to come and is part of all close relationships, what are some ways that help you feel safer during and after conflict as well as draw closer to me?
3. What are some ways that we can create more intimacy around our conflicts?

### *Intellectual intimacy: Sharing thoughts and ideas on a variety of topics*

1. Do you feel safe to share some of your intellectual thoughts with me?
2. Have there been times that we discussed an intellectual issue that is separate from our relationship and you felt closer to me?
3. What are some topics that you enjoy discussing and talking about?  
  
What are some subjects that you don't feel comfortable discussing because they are intimidating or that you just don't really enjoy?
4. What are some ways we could instill more intellectual intimacy into our relationship?

### *Work Intimacy: Closeness in sharing common tasks*

1. Do you feel like we are a team when it comes to working together?
2. Can you think of times in our relationship when you felt closer to me when working on a project or a common task or goal?
3. What are some ways that we can feel more like a team when it comes to work, common tasks, or a goal?

### *Crisis (or extremely stressful event) Intimacy: Togetherness in coping with overwhelming problems and pain*

1. Can you think of times when we had a crisis or experienced extreme amounts of stress but we came together as a couple and felt closer during and/or after the crisis?
2. What are some ways that we can make it safer for each other and feel closer during or after extreme stress or crisis?

## Pornography

1. What level of involvement has pornography played in your life?
  - b. If it has been a past issue (i.e., struggled to stop looking at pornography and are in recovery):
    - i. When was the last time you intentionally sought out pornography?

- ii. At what age were you first exposed to pornography?
  1. What was the circumstance?
  2. How did that event influence you?
- iii. What would you consider to be pornographic or pornography to be?
- iv. What are your general thoughts about pornography?
  1. Do you believe that looking at pornography is a problem or something that people should avoid?
- v. What role, if any, do you expect it to play in our marriage?
- vi. If it has ever been a past problem or to the degree of an addiction,
  1. How did you overcome it?
  2. Did you ever see a therapist and/or attend a 12-Step program to overcome it?
  3. If you did have a past struggle and/or addiction, what are your specific plans to safeguard against any further relapses?
  4. If at any time you relapse or it becomes a problem, do you feel safe telling me?
  5. What is your safety plan to not relapse (e.g., internet filters, no browser access on personal devices, etc.)?
  6. Are you going to any formal treatment or recovery group?
    - a. Is it helping?
  7. What other things are you doing in your life to overcome this addiction?
  8. What were (or still are) some “triggers” or times that you are more vulnerable (e.g., bored, lonely, angry/frustrated, stressed, tired, curiosity, etc.)
- vii. If it ever becomes a problem or a temptation or I relapse and view pornography, do you want me to tell you?
  1. What do you anticipate will be your reaction to me telling you this?
- viii. If it ever becomes a problem or a consistent temptation for you, or you experience a relapse and view pornography, do you feel safe enough to tell me about a relapse or a consistent temptation?



- vii. If it ever becomes a problem or a temptation for me or I relapse and view pornography, do you want me to tell you?
  - i. What do you anticipate will be your reaction to me telling you this?
- viii. If it ever becomes a problem or a consistent temptation for you, or you experience a relapse and view pornography, do you feel safe enough to tell me about a relapse or a temptation?
  - i. What can I do to make it safer for you to open and honest about it?

## The Wedding and Honeymoon

- 1. Although it may not be realistic, but just for fun, what would be your *dream* wedding?
- 2. Back to reality, what are your expectations of our wedding?
  - a. What level of involvement do see our parents or family having?
  - b. What level of involvement do you see (or want) me having in the planning?
  - c. How many guests do each of us get to invite?
    - i. Is there a potential for people getting offended by not being invited?
    - ii. How should we manage this?
  - d. Who do you expect to be your bridesmaids and groomsmen?
    - i. Is there a potential of people being offended by this?
  - e. What is our budget for the dress, cake, reception center, catering, etc.?
    - i. What financial responsibility (me, you, parents, grandparents, etc.) do you anticipate in this?
- 3. Are you going to have a bachelor or bachelorette party?
  - a. What are your expected boundaries around this?
  - b. In your opinion, what are appropriate and inappropriate activities at my party?
- 4. Again, it may not be in our budget or ability, but what would be your *dream* honeymoon?

5. Back to reality, what are your expectations of our honeymoon? (You may want to refer back to some of the questions about sexual intimacy in this section as well)
  - a. Where would you like to go?
  - b. How long will we be gone?
  - c. What is our budget?
  - d. Would you like to do a lot of activities or just take it easy and relax most of the time?
  - e. How often do you expect to be sexually intimate on our honeymoon?
  - f. How soon after the wedding would you like to leave town for our honeymoon?

## Fidelity in Romantic Relationships

1. Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?
2. What does being faithful mean to you?
3. What are your expectations of your relationships and interactions with the opposite sex or an attractive other?
  4. Are there any friends of the opposite sex that you have that you intend to keep in close contact with after we are married?
5. How do you feel about keeping friends of the opposite sex or former romantic partners as friends on Facebook?
6. When would a friendship with a member of the opposite sex become a problem?
  7. How do you feel about having the passwords to each other's email, Facebook, Instagram, or other social networking sites?
8. Do you consider viewing pornography cheating or being unfaithful?
  9. If either one of us ever becomes uncomfortable about the other's interactions with a member of the opposite sex or an attractive other, how should we approach this issue?

## Family Planning and Parenting

1. Do you want have children?
  - a. If so, *when* would you like to have them?
  - b. How many children would you like to have?
2. When it comes to being a parent,
  - a. What parts of parenting would you like to keep from how your parents or guardians parented you and what parts would you like to do differently?
  - b. What are some of the best qualities a parent could have?
  - c. What do you expect from *me* as a parent?
  - d. What are your goals for parenthood?
  - e. How involved do you see yourself with our children?
  - f. How involved was your father and mother with you?
    - i. How will you be similar and different from them?
  - g. What are some of your thoughts, feelings, and expectations on caring for our children's physical needs such as changing diapers, bathing, and feeding them?
  - h. How do you see yourself attending to and caring for our children's emotional needs such as comforting, validating, teaching, bedtime rituals, playing with them, attending their extracurricular or school activities?
  - i. What is your expectation about who will help with our children's homework?
    - i. What subjects do you feel confident helping with?
  - j. If I believe that it might be helpful for you to be more (or less) involved in our children's lives, what would be the best way to approach you on this?
3. Do you expect to finish college or be established in a profession before we have children?
4. What are your thoughts and feelings about birth control?
  - a. What type of birth control do you expect us to use?

- b. When we are done having children, what are your thoughts about one of us getting a medical procedure as a more permanent form of birth control (e.g., vasectomy/tubal ligation)?
5. How are you planning on disciplining our children? What are your thoughts on spanking?
6. Do you want to have a weekly “family night” ritual?
  - a. If so, what is your expectation with this? Who should organize, initiate, and prepare this weekly or monthly event?
7. What are some of your thoughts, feelings, and expectations about public schooling, private schooling, or home schooling our children?
  - a. Do have any particularly strong feelings for or against any of these options?
8. How and what do you want to teach our children about money?
  - a. When do you think is an appropriate time to start teaching our children about money?
  - b. Who do you see doing it? Me, you, or both?
9. How and what do you want to teach our children about sexual intimacy and their own sexuality?
  - a. When do you think is an appropriate time to start teaching our children about sexuality?
  - b. Who do you see doing it? Me, you, or both?
  - c. What topics do you see as appropriate to discuss with them as they mature?
  - d. Are we going to teach them about contraception, abstinence, or both?
  - e. Do you support or oppose sex education in the schools?
10. What role will video games play with our children?
11. What are your parental boundaries around TV and movie ratings (MA, R, PG-13, PG, G) and what you would like our children to watch or not watch?
  12. What extracurricular activities will you encourage for our children and what extracurricular activities do you disapprove of?
13. Are there any leisure activities that you are involved in or expect to be involved in after we have kids that would be considered physically risk, dangerous, or life-threatening (e.g., para-gliding, base jumping)? If so, we might need to talk about alternative activities or giving up that activity.

14. What might be your thoughts and emotions if one of our children would like to do an activity that is not traditionally participated in by their same gender? (For example, a girl joining the wrestling team or a boy signing up for ballet.)
15. What do you think your response would be if one of our children told that he or she was gay or experiencing same-sex attraction?
16. What if we are unable to have children, how will that affect our relationship?
  - a. Are you open to medical procedures (e.g., IVF) to help with pregnancy?
  - b. Are you open to the idea of adoption?

## Religion and Religiosity

1. How important are our religious beliefs in marriage?
2. What religious denomination do you plan on attending and practicing?
3. Do you plan on raising our children in a specific religion?
  - a. If so, which one?
4. If the two of you share the same religious beliefs or belong to the same religious organization,
  - a. How do you see us practicing our faith in our marriage and family?
  - b. What does it mean for you to be “faithful” in our religion?
  - c. Do you expect us to have individual prayers, couple prayers, family prayers?
  - d. Do you expect us to read scriptural texts individually, as a couple, or as a family?
  - e. How often do you think we should attend church, synagogue, temple, or religious events?
  - f. What amount of tithes or offerings do you expect to pay in our (or your) faith?
  - g. What other areas of our (or your) faith (e.g., doctrines, commandments, or principles, etc.) do you see as important to practice and how do you see yourself or us practicing them?
  - h. Who do you expect to initiate and carry out religious rituals in our marriage and family?
    - i. Should this be shared or do you believe one person should take the lead on certain activities?

- i. What does it mean to you to “keep the Sabbath day holy”?
  - i. What were your parents/guardians boundaries around this?
- j. How involved do you see us being in our church as far as attendance, church programs and activities, leadership and service roles?
- k. Are there any doctrines, commandments, or principles of our faith (or your faith) that you disagree with, have a difficult time understanding, or difficulty living in accordance to?
  - l. Have you ever seriously considered leaving your particular religion, changing to another religion, or dissociating yourself from all religious organizations?
5. If the two of you have *different* religious beliefs or belong to different religious organizations,
  - a. Considering we have different beliefs, how do you foresee this dynamic affecting our marriage and family?
  - b. Do you have any hope or expectation that I will “convert” to your religious organization or eventually practice my faith similar to yours?
  - c. Some churches encourage a lot of participation from members. What are your expectations and thoughts on me being involved in the church programs, activities, or leadership roles?
  - d. Are there any doctrines, commandments, or principles of your faith that you disagree with, have a difficult time understanding, or difficulty living in accordance to?
  - e. What does it mean to you to be “faithful” in your religion?
  - f. Have you ever seriously considered leaving your particular religion, changing to another religion, or dissociating yourself from all religious organizations?
6. How do you think people should dress when they attend worship services and do you expect that from me?
7. Some people are very private with their personal spiritual experiences and thoughts. What is your expectations, thoughts, and feelings about the actual sharing of these experiences with me?
8. Who in your immediate and extended family is religious and who is not?

## Leisure/Hobbies/Interests

1. What are your hobbies or interests?
2. What are your thoughts and feelings about *my* hobbies and/or interests?
3. What amount of money do you spend (or expect to spend) on your hobbies and interests?
4. Are you interested in understanding more about or participating in *my* hobbies?
5. What are your feelings about doing hobbies and/or interests separately?
6. How often do you expect to go on a vacation?
7. How would you define a vacation?
8. If money weren't an issue, what would be your "dream" vacation?
9. Some people say that the difference between a trip and a vacation is that a vacation is just the two parents and a trip involves children. Would you agree with that?
10. What do you like to do to relax or "unwind"?
11. If you had a completely free day with no work, school, or other responsibilities, what would you do?
12. How often do you expect to watch sports?
13. Do you have any specific boundaries or objections to certain types of media (e.g., R-rated movies, TV shows)?
14. How often do you play video games?
  - a. If you play video games extensively, do you see yourself maintaining this level in our marriage and after we have children?
15. What things are you *passionate* about?

If any of your hobbies or interests begin to interfere with our ability to have time together or with our family, how do you think we should approach this issue?

## Personal Emotional Health and Boundaries

1. If I were describing the kind of person you are to a friend or family member who didn't know you, what do you think I might say about you?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. What are some of your greatest *personal* strengths?
4. What are some of your greatest *relationship* strengths that will help us in our marriage?
5. What are some challenges in your personality that might hinder us in our marriage?
6. Everybody has challenges and insecurities but what is your overall impression of yourself?
7. What does it mean and what does it look like to be an emotionally healthy individual?
8. Who is someone that you know well and admire that you would say is emotionally healthy?
9. On a scale of 1-10, (10 = extremely and 1 = not at all), how much do others opinions of you affect you?
10. Have you ever struggled with jealousy in our relationship or past romantic relationships?
11. Of all of your friends who are your same gender, how many of them would say you are really close to, trust, and really enjoy being with?
  - a. Would they would say the same about you?
12. Would you say that, in general, you are an open person and tend to trust others?
  - a. If yes, how do think this will be helpful for us in our marriage?
  - b. If no, how do you think this will affect us in our marriage?
13. Everybody experiences stress, sadness, frustration, and anger from time to time. What do you tend to do to be resilient and "bounce" back from these experiences?
  - a. How long does it take you to "bounce" back?
  - b. For some people, when their plans don't work out they will blame others, get upset at themselves, withdraw while others tend to adapt and are flexible. What do you tend to do?
    - i. Can you think of a time in our relationship where something didn't go as planned? What did you do, what did you think? How did you feel about this disruption?

14. Do you have a history of any kind of addiction (prescription drugs, illegal drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc.)? (Note: Almost anything can become a problem if it is engaged in enough, but some common activities are eating, playing video games, watching TV, shopping, social media, hobbies, pornography, gossiping, etc.)

a. If you have struggled with an addiction of any kind, where are you with it now?

i. What kind of help did you receive for it?

ii. How long have you been in recovery for it?

Are there any other activities that you engage in that might turn into an addiction or be used to “numb” yourself from negative emotions?

15. Do you have a lot of stuff or are you a minimalist?

16. Do you consider yourself organized or disorganized?

17. Have you ever been to a psychologist/therapist/counselor? For what reason?

a. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental disorder? If so, what was the diagnosis?

b. What was done to treat it?

c. Where are you now with this challenge?

18. What does having healthy boundaries mean to you?

a. Are you able to say “no” to people when they ask you to do something that you really don’t have the time or means to do?

b. Who in your life do you feel like you have good boundaries with?

c. Who in your life do you feel like you have poor boundaries with?

d. Is there anyone in your life that you associate with consistently that you would say is emotionally harmful or “toxic?”

e. Would you say that you have a good balance of work, rest, recreation, and play?

## Miscellaneous

1. Is your family supportive of our relationship or pending marriage?
2. Who are some of the more influential people in your life (including family, friends, religious leaders, etc.)
3. What do you want your life to look like in 1, 5, 10, 25 years?
4. What do you want our life to look like in 1, 5, 10, 25 years?
5. Is there going to be a TV in our bedroom?
6. If we do decide to marry, does your father expect me to ask for his blessing?
7. What do you usually do when you are sick? (e.g., Some people don't like to interact with others when they are sick and would rather just hide in their room; while others like a lot of attention.)
  - a. What are your expectations of me when you are sick?
8. What are some of your "pet peeves"?
  - a. Do I do any of your pet peeves?
    - i. If so, is this going to cause conflict in our relationship?
9. Do you support the idea of utilizing babysitters and/or maids or housecleaners?
10. If you died while we were married, would you want me to remarry?
11. How much will alcohol or tobacco be a part of our life together?
  - a. How much is too much?
12. Is there anything in your past or current circumstances that would be important for me to know about? (Caution: If you are already married or highly committed to this relationship and decide to ask this question, be prepared to take on anything that is said.)

Are there *any* problems or issues in our relationship that you think we need to discuss before we get married?

## Suggested Readings for Premarital Couples

*Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts* by Les and Leslie Parrot

*Fighting for Your Marriage* by Dr. Howard Markman, Dr. Scott Stanley, and Dr. Susan Blumberg

*The Couple Check-up* by Dr. David Olson, Amy Olson-Sigg, and Dr. Peter Larson.

*The Five Love Languages* by Dr. Gary Chapman

*Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness* by Dr. Blaine Fowers

*Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by Dr. John Gottman

*Love Sense* by Dr. Sue Johnson

## Questions for Re-Married Couples

1. Does your former spouse know that we are getting married?
2. If your former partner were here today, what would they say about why the marriage ended?
3. What lessons did you learn from your previous marriage?
4. What are some of your regrets from your previous marriage?
5. What were some ways that you and your former spouse were incompatible?
6. What were some ways that you and your former spouse were compatible?
7. What financial debts or payments do you owe your former spouse or partner?
  - a. What is your child support and spousal support arrangement?
8. All break-ups have residual hurts or regrets, what are some of your lingering hurts, regrets, sadness, or emotional pains from your previous marriage?
9. Remarriages are often "rebound" relationships, used to overcome loneliness, to get back at one's previous spouse, to provide another parent for children, for financial security, to engage in sexual intimacy, escape from difficult emotions, or pressure from outside influences. In discussing the following questions, it's important to be honest with yourself and really think about the possibility of any of these issues:

- a. Do you feel like this relationship is a way for you to escape loneliness that often comes after the break-up of a marriage?
  - b. Are there any residual romantic feelings towards your former spouse?
  - c. Are you or would you be angry if your former spouse got remarried?
  - d. Is there anything about our relationship that you are using to try to “get back” at your previous partner?
  - e. It’s understandable to want your child or children to have another parent in their life, is this a *major* part of your decision or desire to get remarried?
  - f. Is being more financially secure a *major* motivation for us to get married?
  - g. Is having a more consistent sexual partner or being sexually intimate again a *major* motivation for us to get married?
  - h. Much like question 8, are there any negative emotions or hurts that you are trying to “heal” or escape from by us getting married?
  - i. Do you feel any pressure from friends, family, children, your job, religious beliefs or affiliation, or society to remarry soon or to remarry at all? And are any of these pressures significantly motivating you to remarry?
  - j. Do you feel like you’ve had enough time to heal or “move on” from your previous marriage?
  - k. Do you feel like you are ready to get married again?
10. Do you have any fears of being compared (e.g., sexually, physically, financially, cooking, etc.) to my former spouse or partner?
11. What would you like to do differently or better in this marriage?
12. How are we going to manage our marriage around our former spouses or former in-laws?
- a. What are some of your fears or worries about my ex-husband/wife or former in-laws?
  - b. What boundaries do we need to take to protect our marriage from any negative influences from our former spouses and former in-laws?
13. If you have children from your previous marriage:
- a. What are some of your children’s greatest emotional needs?
  - b. What role do you anticipate me having in your children’s lives?

- c. How do your children feel about you getting remarried?
- d. What areas of parenting would you like to improve?
- e. What do you expect of me as far as being a stepparent?
- f. Do you think our kids are ready to take on a blended family?
- g. Do you feel like you are ready to be a stepparent?
- h. What is your biggest fear about becoming a stepparent?
  - i. What rituals/traditions did your family practice or celebrate and how did they celebrate that you want to keep when we get married?
- i. If you have grown children that are still in the house, how do you feel about them still living in our house?

### **Suggested Readings for Re-Married Couples**

*Step-coupling* by Susan Wisdom, LPC

*The Re-marriage Check-up* by Ron Deal, LMFT and David H. Olson, PhD.

*Saving Your Second Marriage Before it Starts* by Les Parrott, PhD and Leslie Parrott, PhD

*The Smart Step-Family* by Ron Deal, LMFT

*I would like to thank many of my past clients, participants, colleagues, friends, and students for providing many of these great questions.*

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