

Getting To Know Your Mate: Before You Say I Do

By Dr. Naima Cherie Prince

Below you will find an extensive list of questions that all couples considering marriage should thoroughly discuss. I have been teaching marriage and family courses for quite some time now and one thing that I have learned is that many people face marital problems because they do not take the time to communicate with their partner before saying, "I DO."

People tend to spend more time preparing for their wedding than they do preparing for their marriage. Many take for granted that they know their spouse and that talking about simple things are a waste of time. I am glad that you feel differently. Like all things, marriage takes work to be successful.

Consider the questions below as an investment in your marital future. BEFORE YOU SAY "I DO," please discuss your answer to each of the following questions with your mate. It could make all the difference in the world. While the questions are grouped by topic, there is no particular order that questions should be addressed.

I recommend that you and your mate take one day per question to have an in depth discussion. In terms of time, it should take you about one year to finish this project. I wish you all the best.

MARRIAGE

1. What is the purpose of marriage?
2. What is your definition of a good marriage?
3. What are the most important elements in having a good marriage?
4. What will you use as your guide for a successful marriage?
5. What does being a good husband mean? What does it take to be a good husband. How do you measure whether a husband is a 'good husband'.
6. What does being a good wife mean? What does it take to be a good wife. How do you measure whether a wife is a 'good wife'?
7. How do you expect that marriage will change you?
8. How do you expect that marriage will change your partner?
9. Why do you want to marry your mate?
10. Why should your mate want to marry you?
11. What do you think about pre-marital counseling? Who should go to pre-marital counseling? Would you be willing to attend? For how long? Who would you go to? Why? How much are you willing to spend on counseling?
12. What do you think about marital counseling? Who should go to marital counseling? Would you be willing to attend? Under what circumstances would you be willing to attend? For how long? Who would you go to? Why? How much are you willing to spend on counseling?
13. What work do you believe is involved in making a marriage work? What are you willing to give up (sacrifice) for marriage? What do you expect your mate to give up (sacrifice) for marriage?

14. What are your greatest concerns/fears or apprehensions about marriage in general? What about marrying your mate in particular?

CHILDREN

1. How do you feel about small children?
2. Do you enjoy caring for and spending time with children?
3. What type of experience have you had with children?
4. Do you want children? Why or why not?
5. Are you able to have children of your own? If not, how do you feel about adoption?
6. If you want children, how many? How far apart in years should children be placed? Are you prepared to have children now? When?
7. What makes a good mother?
8. What makes a good father?
9. Do you think that you would make a good father/mother? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that your mate would make a good father/mother? Why or why not?
11. How would having a child/children change your life? What do you like about this? What don't you like about this?
12. How would having a child change your mate? What do you like about this? What don't you like about this?
13. How does having a child/children change the relationship between a husband and a wife? What do you like about this? What don't you like about this?
14. What behavioral/attitudinal changes would you recommend to your mate in order for them to be a good parent in your eyes?
15. Which role is more important, wife or mother? Should the two be separate or intertwined? Why?
16. Which role is more important, husband or father? Should the two be separate or intertwined? Why?
17. How should children be disciplined? Why is this way best, in your opinion?
18. Who should discipline children? Why?
19. What would you do if had an unplanned pregnancy?
20. What additional expenses would you incur if pregnancy occurred? Are you prepared for such expenses now?
21. How do you want to share the responsibility for caring for a child? How should child rearing duties be divided between mother and father for children ranging from infancy to adulthood.
22. Which is preferable: home schooling, public schooling or private schooling? Why?
23. How do you want your child's childhood to be like your childhood.
24. How do you want your child's childhood to be different from your childhood.
25. Are you interested in birth control? What form of birth control are you most interested in? Whose responsibility is birth control? How long are you interested in using birth control?

STEP-PARENTING

1. Do you already have children or is it possible that you have a child from a previous relationship? How many?
2. What is your financial responsibility to your children from a previous relationship?
3. How will this marriage affect your responsibilities to your children from a previous relationship?
4. What has the court ordered with regards to your children from a previous relationship?
5. How many parents are involved with your children? What is your relationship with your children's other parents? How do you interact with the parents of your children from a previous relationship?
6. How do you think a step-mother/father should interact with the children from a previous relationship?
7. When do you spend time with children from a previous relationship?
8. Will your children from a previous relationship live with you? Will they visit you? How often and for how long? Where will they stay in your house?
9. Will the children from a previous relationship spend holidays with you? Which holidays? What if the non-residential child from a previous relationship wanted or needed to come live with you?
10. Have you talked to your children about the possibility of marriage? How did they react? How do they feel? Do they like the step-mother/father to be?
11. What makes a good step-mother/father? Do you have what it takes to be a stepmother/father?
12. How is being a stepparent different from being a biological parent?
13. Do you think that your mate has what it takes to be a good step-parent?
14. What issues are you very sensitive about when it comes to your children from a previous relationship?
15. What changes should your mate make, in your opinion, to be a good stepparent?
16. What behavioral/attitudinal changes would you recommend to your mate in order for them to be a good stepparent in your eyes?

IN-LAWS

1. Describe your current relationship with the family that you grew up in. Discuss parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, nephews and cousins.
2. Describe your childhood relationship with the family that you grew up in. Discuss parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, nephews and cousins.
3. What are your responsibilities/obligations to the family you were raised in? How often do you like to see your family?
4. How often do you like to talk to your family?
5. What part will your family play in planning your wedding?
6. What part will your family play in your marriage?
7. What part will your family play in your children's lives?
8. What has been your experience with marriage through your family? How many people in your family are divorced? How many people in your family are in marriages lasting 10 years or more.

9. What do you think of your mate's parents and family? What do you think that your mate's parents and family think of you? How do you feel about this?
10. What do your parents and family think of your mate? How do you feel about this?
11. Do you have your family's blessing to get married? How do you feel about this?
12. Which family will you visit during holidays?
13. How often will the in-laws visit you and for how long?
14. When you visit your parents, will you both go?
15. Should in-laws be consulted in important decisions that affect your marriage?
16. Should parents be consulted about how to raise your children?
17. What family traditions would you like to keep?
18. How important is it to celebrate the holidays with your family?
19. What holidays are most important to spend together? Is it more important to you or to your family that you spend holidays together?
20. What is the limit on how often family members may come and visit after you are married?
21. When a problem arises with one of your families, how will it be handled?
22. When your parents are no longer able to care for themselves, what responsibilities will you and your spouse take in caring for them?
23. How do you feel about asking your family for assistance? Why do you feel this way? How do you feel about asking your mate's family for assistance? Why do you feel this way?

RELIGION

1. What is your religion? What is the major premise of your belief?
2. What beliefs do you have about life and death?
3. What beliefs do you have about good and evil?
4. Do you attend religious services? Why or why not? If you do not attend religious services, how often do you go? If you do not currently attend services, do you plan to go in the future?
5. How do you feel about attending religious services with your mate, at their place of worship?
6. How would your family feel about you worshipping with your mate at his/her place of worship?
7. How would your god feel about you worshipping with your mate at his/her place of worship?
8. Do you share the same faith?
9. Discuss the theological differences between your mate and yourself.
10. What role will your faith play in your lives?
11. What are your highest moral values?
12. How committed are you to your religion?
13. Do you believe that you and your mate are equally yoked? If not, how will you deal with this?
14. What are your goals with regards to your religion?
15. What does your religion say about marriage? How closely do you prescribe to these dictates?
16. What does your religion say about children?

17. What does your religion suggest regarding male and female roles? What does your religion suggest regarding husband and wife roles?
18. What does your religion suggest about sex and sexuality?
19. What does your religion suggest about birth control?
20. What faith will your children be taught? Will they go to religious services?
21. What religious services? What is your belief about and plan on tithing and providing financial contributions to your religious body?
22. People sometimes change faith or denominations. What would you accept, what would be out of the question? Would either of you convert to the other's beliefs?

FINANCES

1. What, if any, are your financial assets going into this marriage (account balances, stocks, mutual funds, bonds, property)? Do you feel you can be open about this? If not, why not?
2. How much income do you have? How much of this comes from your job? From other sources?
3. Will you have a prenuptial agreement? If yes, to protect whom and/or what? What is the ideal way to handle finances in a marriage?
4. Obtain a copy of your credit report and share this with your mate. Discuss your plan to pay off your debt.
5. Who will be responsible for your debt after you marry? What is your perspective on debt?
6. Are you willing to put everything in joint names or do you want to maintain your assets separately?
7. Will you maintain separate checking accounts? Savings accounts?
8. How much savings do you have? What is the money in your savings account for? How much do you think you need to have in the bank for a 'rainy day'?
9. Think of a time when you were unable to pay an unexpected expense? How did you deal with it?
10. Who will handle the checkbook for the household bills?
11. What money goes into the household account? (For example, paychecks, interest and dividends; gifts; any miscellaneous income)
12. How should major decisions be made? Will you both have the freedom to spend as you wish or will you have to answer to each other? All the time? What amount of money would you spend without consulting the other first?
13. Will you give to charity? Which ones? How much? How will such decisions be made?
14. Will you help out your family when they are in financial need?
15. If you have money left over at the end of the month, what will you spend it on?
16. How much life insurance do you currently have? How much will need after the marriage? Will you share credit cards? What charges go on them?
17. Will you have your own credit cards? What charges would go on those?
18. Who will pay for your clothes? Your car insurance? Trips? Entertainment? Gifts - for both your families? For your friends? Who pays for home furnishings? Your next car?

20. If there's only one wage earner, will the non-earning spouse receive an allowance?
Free access to the checkbook?
21. Does the earned income belong equally to you both? Or does the wage earner have control?
22. Who's going to own the marital residence? If not joint ownership, is there any protection for the non-owning spouse in case of death or divorce?
23. What are your long-term financial goals? What are you doing right now to plan for them?
24. Do you intend to buy a house? If so, do you have a workable plan for saving the money needed?
25. Write out your current budget. Write down how much you make and how much you spend, so that you account for where all your money goes. What do you do with the money that's left?
26. Create a plan to share necessary living expenses. What is more important, financial security or having a good time?
27. Should a person have their own bank account separate from their spouse's? Should the person who makes the most money have the final say about how money is spent?
28. How much allowance do you need for yourself in any given month. For what?

HOUSEHOLD

1. What is necessary for a place to seem like home to you?
2. What things are most important in having a clean house?
3. Who should take care of what housekeeping responsibilities?
4. Describe your "dream home"
5. Do you know how to plan menus, cook, and serve food?
6. How do you want your home to be decorated?
7. What styles do you prefer?
8. Do you know how to budget and handle finances?
9. What standards do you have for the cleanliness of your home?
10. Do you know basic home maintenance (i.e. plumbing, painting, lawn care)?
11. Do you know basic auto maintenance (i.e. how to change a tire, change the oil)?
12. Do you know basic child care (changing diapers, doing hair, feeding etc.)?

YOUR MATE

1. What are the things that you do that your mate finds most encouraging?
2. What are the things that you do that your mate finds most bothersome?
3. What are your mate's top five priorities?
4. How do they compare to your priorities?
5. How would you like your mate to respond when you are upset?
6. Which "good manners" are important to your mate? Do you practice them?
7. What are your mate's top three personal interests?
8. What are the three things the two of you most like to do together?
9. What is your mate's favorite way to relax?
10. How will your mate react you are late picking him/her up?
11. How does your mate handle and express anger?

12. In what areas would you like your mate to keep you accountable? How?
13. What should your mate know that you are sensitive about?
14. What are your mate's goals? How will you support your mate's goals?
15. What does your mate really want out of life?
16. What are things that you do to make your mate happy?
17. What does your mate do to make you happy?
18. How controlling is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
19. How demanding is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
20. How responsible is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
21. How dependable/reliable is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
22. How suspicious is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
23. How affectionate is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
24. How mature is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
25. How independent is your mate? What makes you say so?
26. How needy is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
27. How mannerable is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
28. How honest is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
29. How athletic is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
30. How forgiving is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
31. How selfish is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
32. How self-conscious is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
33. How hospitable is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
34. How friendly is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
35. How spontaneous is your mate? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this? How would you describe your mate's self-esteem? What makes you say so? What are your thoughts on this?
36. What do you think about your mate's friends?
37. How much time does your mate spend with his/her friends? What are your thoughts on this?
38. How do you feel about your mate going out with friends without you?

INTERESTS

1. What kinds of films do you enjoy?
2. What kinds of concerts do you enjoy?
3. What kinds of music do you enjoy?
4. What kinds of games do you enjoy?
5. What kinds of sports do you enjoy?
6. What kinds of cultural events do you enjoy?
7. What kinds of television shows do you enjoy?
8. What kinds of books do you enjoy?
9. What makes you laugh the most?
10. What interests do you prefer to pursue alone?
11. What interests would you like to share with your mate?

TIME & SPACE

1. How much privacy should each partner have?
2. Is it okay for married couples to keep secrets from one another?
3. How important is it that you have time alone each day?
4. What are some important considerations in organizing your space?
5. What rituals do you go through before starting a trip?
6. What rituals do you go through before going to bed?
7. What rituals do you go through before getting ready in the morning?
8. What would you be willing to give up, in terms of space.
9. When do you most want your mate with you?
10. When do you most want to be alone?
11. Do you ever just waste time? What is your favorite way to waste time?
12. How much time do you allow for reading each week? When?
13. Will you limit television use in your home? To what extent?
14. Will you limit telephone use in your home?
15. Will you limit computer use in your home? To what extent?
16. How much time would you like to spend discussing the relationship?
17. What do you consider 'working on the relationship'?
18. If a friend asks you to do something spontaneous but you have time planned with your beloved, what do you do?
19. Should you check in with your spouse before making plans?
20. What is important about the time you spend alone together?
21. What is important about the time spent with others?

CAREER

1. What are your career plans for the future? Why have you chosen your career goals?
2. Do you want to work once you are married?
3. Do you expect to go back to or continue school? Where and when? How much will that education cost (in time and money)?
4. What will you have to sacrifice in order to pursue your career?

5. How do you see yourself 6 months from now? 2 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years? How can your mate support your goals?
6. How does your career goals affect/interact with your goals marriage and family?
7. Do you think you will need to move because of a job?
8. What is more important to you, career or family?
9. How do you view male vs female career goals within a marriage? Whose goals take priority?
10. What qualities do you have that a potential employer might find valuable? What can you do to make yourself more qualified for employment?
11. How will family and career be balanced in your lives?
12. What is your plan should you lose your job?

SEX

1. How many sexual partners have you had?
2. Have you ever been with a person of the same-sex?
3. Have you ever been attracted to a person of the same sex?
4. How often should a married couple have sex?
5. When is it appropriate for two people to have sexual relations?
6. Which sexually transmitted diseases have you had? What was the outcome?
7. What are your sexual preferences?
8. What will you expect your mate to do to keep you sexually satisfied?
9. How important is sex in your marital satisfaction?
10. Did you experience sexual abuse as a child? Discuss.
11. Did you experience sexual abuse as an adult? Discuss.
12. Have you ever been unfaithful in a relationship? What were the circumstances?
13. Has a previous partner ever been unfaithful? How did that effect you?
14. Get tested for HIV/AIDS and discuss your results together.

VIOLENCE

1. How do you act when you are angry?
2. What is the best way to resolve conflict?
3. Have you resolved a problem in your relationship yet? What was the problem and what was the solution you found? Was it a good solution that was okay with both of you? Was there a better solution that you can think of now?
4. Have you ever been in an abusive relationship? What happened?
5. Have you been in a physical fight with anyone in your adult life? What were the circumstances?
6. Did you witness physical violence in the family in which you were raised? Discuss?
7. Have you ever deliberately destroyed property? What were the circumstances?
8. Under which circumstances might you physically harm your mate?
9. Have you ever lost control of yourself? What happened?
10. Have you ever been arrested for physical assault?

DIVORCE

1. How do you view divorce?

2. Why do you think that 57% of all marriages fail?
3. How can couples avoid divorce?
4. Under what circumstances would you want a divorce?
5. What has been your experience with divorce?

PERSONALITY

1. Name five things that you do not like about yourself and discuss how you are dealing with these things.
2. Name five things that you do not like about your partner and discuss how you are dealing with these things.
3. What are your greatest weaknesses?
4. What are your greatest strengths?
5. Where do you want to live after getting married?
6. How are you and your mate alike? How are you different? What are some ways that your different strengths work together? How can you use your strengths to help each other? How do you react in a crisis or emergency?
7. Discuss your daily schedule that you intend to regularly follow? How do you behave under pressure?
8. What type of language are you comfortable/uncomfortable with (profanity, slang, proper english etc.)?
9. Are you prepared to trust your spouse's decisions?
10. What makes you feel loved? How will you show you will always be there? How should disputes in public be handled?
11. What is "off limits" in disagreements/arguments?
12. How important is it to have a specific "date night" when you are married?
13. How controlling are you? How controlling is your mate?