

PREPARE  ENRICH.

Workbook

for Couples

CATHOLIC
VERSION

The Catholic version of PREPARE/ENRICH couple's relationship assessment, Catholic Couple Checkup, and the Workbook for Couples: Catholic Version have received **Censors Liborum** declarations of **Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur** from the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

You are joining over 4 million couples who have taken this important step in building a strong marriage and healthy relationship by taking the PREPARE/ENRICH assessment. For over 35 years, research studies have demonstrated PREPARE/ENRICH can improve your relationship skills and happiness as a couple.

The PREPARE/ENRICH Workbook for Couples is a compliment to your assessment results. It contains skill-building exercises that will help you to understand and apply the insights from the assessment. The exercises consist of questions to both ponder individually and discuss as a couple plus activities to do together. Begin with the recommended Six Core Exercises and continue with the remaining exercises in any order. This version includes references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church as indicated by paragraph numbers as well as Bible verses for reflection, inspiration and encouragement.

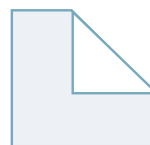
KEY



= Six Core Exercises



= Couple Discussion



= Tips or Optional Activity

Additional Resources

PREPARE/ENRICH offers additional ways to help you prioritize, enrich, and strengthen your relationship:

- Join our Strong Couple's Club at prepare-enrich.com/strong.couples.club.html
- Read our blog at blog.prepare-enrich.com
- Connect with us on social media:
 - facebook.com/prepare.enrich
 - twitter.com/prepareenrich
 - youtube.com/prepareenrich
- Take our "do it yourself" assessment, Couple Checkup, on your wedding anniversary at couplecheckup.com

If you find you have ongoing problems that don't go away over time, it is important to seek professional counseling. Like any problem or illness, the sooner you go for help the better the chances are for recovery. If problems persist, contact your current Facilitator or go to prepare-enrich.com to find a Facilitator in your area.



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★ = Six Core Exercises

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CATHOLIC VIEW OF MARRIAGE

*From www.ForYourMarriage.org, an initiative of the
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

MARRIAGE READINESS

Having a successful marriage means more than FINDING the right person. It means BEING the right person. Sometimes, the FINDING part is easier. . .

BEING the right person can be tougher. Are you easy to live with, generous, flexible, and willing to put your beloved's needs before your own? Above all, are both of you mature? Maturity means knowing who you are...your talents...your weaknesses...your interests...the things you hate to do...the values that you will not compromise...the preferences that you are willing to bend on... and, what you want out of life and marriage.

Out of this self-knowledge comes the possibility of giving oneself freely to your beloved.

CATHOLIC BELIEFS

Catholics believe that marriage comes as a gift from the hand of God. The Catholic vision of marriage is rooted in Sacred Scripture and is expressed in the teachings and practices of the Church. It has these main elements:

- Marriage unites a couple in faithful and mutual love
- Marriage opens a couple to giving life
- Marriage is a way to respond to God's call to holiness
- Marriage calls the couple to be a sign of Christ's love in the world

BIBLICAL ROOTS OF MARRIAGE

Old Testament

According to Sacred Scripture, God instituted marriage as the pinnacle of creation. On the sixth day, in the first creation story, the Book of Genesis tells us: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: 'Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1: 27-28).

In the second creation story, God says that "it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." (Genesis 2:18). This suitable helpmate was formed from the very rib of man and thus woman was "flesh of his flesh" (Genesis 2:22-23).

Woman, then, is man's equal in dignity and the one closest to his heart. Because man and woman were created for one another, "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh" (Genesis 2: 24). Scripture teaches that marriage is not a mere human institution, but something God established from the foundation of the world.

Sin not only brought about a break with God, but it also ruptured the original communion between man and woman. Adam and Eve blamed each another for what had happened and were now embarrassed by their nakedness (Genesis 3:7-13). The Old Testament shows how sin affected the goodness of marriage...



CATHOLIC VIEW OF MARRIAGE

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

New Testament

Christians are new creations in Christ, healed of sin and its effects. Marriage is also recreated and made new in Christ. Jesus tells us that in the Kingdom of God the permanent union of husband and wife that God originally intended can once more be realized (see Matthew 19:6-11). By the grace of the Holy Spirit, husbands and wives can now truly love and honor one another. St. Paul tells us that marriage bears witness to the indissoluble love of Christ for his Church. Thus, husbands should love their wives, “even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25-26). Wives, too, are called to love their husbands as the Church loves Christ (see Eph. 5:22-23)...

Because marriage is placed within the saving mystery of Jesus Christ, Catholics recognize it as a sacrament. It is a means through which husbands and wives grow in love for one another and for their children, become holy and obtain eternal life.

For further reading: Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1602-1617

MEANING AND PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is the intimate union and equal partnership of a man and a woman. It comes to us from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image, so that they might become one body and might be fertile and multiply (See Genesis chapters 1 and 2). Though man and woman are equal as God’s children, they are created with important differences that allow them to give themselves and to receive the other as a gift.

Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. In addition, the Catholic Church teaches that the valid marriage between two baptized Christians is also a sacrament – a saving reality and a symbol of Christ’s love for his church (See Ephesians 5:25-33). In every marriage the spouses make a contract with each other. In a sacramental marriage the couple also enters into a covenant in which their love is sealed and strengthened by God’s love.

The free consent of the spouses makes a marriage. From this consent and from the sexual consummation of marriage a special bond arises between husband and wife. This bond is lifelong and exclusive. The marriage bond has been established by God and so it cannot be dissolved...

Permanency, exclusivity, and faithfulness are essential to marriage because they foster and protect the two equal purposes of marriage. These two purposes are growth in mutual love between the spouses (unitive) and the generation and education of children (procreative)...

The family arises from marriage. Parents, children, and family members form what is called a domestic church or church of the home. This is the primary unit of the Church – the place where the Church lives in the daily love, care, hospitality, sacrifice, forgiveness, prayer and faith of ordinary families.

For further reading: Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1601-1666



SHARING STRENGTH AND GROWTH AREAS

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control . . . — Galatians 5:22-23

Check what areas you agree or disagree most with your partner.

- 1. Select three Strength Areas** (most agreement and positive aspects of your relationship)
- 2. Select three Growth Areas** (most disagreement and areas you want to improve)

| | STRENGTH AREAS | GROWTH AREAS |
|---|----------------|--------------|
| 1. COMMUNICATION <i>We share feelings and understand each other.</i> | | |
| 2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION <i>We are able to discuss and resolve differences.</i> | | |
| 3. PARTNER STYLE AND HABITS <i>We appreciate each other's personality and habits.</i> | | |
| 4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT <i>We agree on budget and financial matters.</i> | | |
| 5. LEISURE ACTIVITIES <i>We have a good balance of activities together and apart.</i> | | |
| 6. SEXUALITY AND AFFECTION <i>We are comfortable discussing sexual issues and affection.</i> | | |
| 7. FAMILY AND FRIENDS <i>We feel good about our relationships with relatives and friends.</i> | | |
| 8. RELATIONSHIP ROLES <i>We agree on how to share decision-making and responsibilities.</i> | | |
| 9. CHILDREN AND PARENTING <i>We agree on issues related to having and raising children.</i> | | |
| 10. SPIRITUAL BELIEFS <i>We hold similar religious values and beliefs.</i> | | |

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Take turns sharing what each of you perceive as your relationship strengths. Verbally share one strength at a time, until you each have shared three.
- Use the same procedure to share and discuss growth areas.
- Discuss these three questions:
 - Did any of your partner's responses surprise you?
 - In what areas did you mostly agree with your partner?
 - In what areas did you mostly disagree with your partner?





COMMUNICATION

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. — James 1:19

ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in the relationship.

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to be quite assertive. Rather than assuming their partner can read their minds, they share how they feel and ask clearly and directly for what they want.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using “I” statements. They avoid statements beginning with “you.” In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. They use polite phrases such as “please” and “thank you”.

Examples of Assertive Statements

“I’m feeling out of balance. While I love spending time with you, I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this.”

“I want to take a ski vacation next winter, but I know you like to go to the beach. I’m feeling confused about what choice we should make.”

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

Good communication depends on you carefully listening to another person. Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. Acknowledge content AND the feelings of the speaker. The active listening process lets the sender know whether or not the message they sent was clearly understood by having the listener restate what they heard.

Examples of Active Listening

“I heard you say you are feeling ‘out of balance’, and enjoy the time we spend together but that you also need more time to be with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this.”

“If I understand what you said, you are concerned because you want to go skiing next winter. But you think I would rather to go to the beach. Is that correct?”

When each person knows what the other person feels and wants (assertiveness) and when each knows they have been heard and understood (active listening), intimacy is increased. These two communication skills can help you grow closer as a couple.



COMMUNICATION

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. — Psalm 19:14*

CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your Active Listening skills.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

SHARING YOUR WISH LIST

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other, keeping in mind the following:

- Speaker's Job:
 - Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...").
 - Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.
- Listener's Job:
 - Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
 - Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

- How good were each of you at being assertive?
- In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?





COMMUNICATION

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.
— Proverbs 12:18

DAILY DIALOGUE AND DAILY COMPLIMENTS

Daily Dialogue is an intentional effort to talk about your relationship, rather than discussing your activities that day. The focus of this dialogue should be on your feelings about each other and your lives together. Set aside five minutes per day to discuss the following:

- What did you most enjoy about your relationship today?
- What was dissatisfying about your relationship today?
- How can you be helpful to each other?

Daily Compliments help you focus on the positive things you like about each other. Every day give your partner at least one genuine compliment. These can be general (“*you are fun to be with*”) or specific (“*I appreciate that you were on time for the concert*”).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INCREASE INTIMACY

1. **Give full attention to your partner when talking.** Turn off the phone, shut off the television, make eye contact.
2. **Focus on the good qualities in each other and praise each other often.**
3. **Be assertive.** Share your thoughts, feelings, and needs. A good way to be assertive without being critical is to use “I” rather than “You” statements. (e.g. “*I worry when you don’t let me know you’ll be late*” rather than “*You are always late*”).
4. **Avoid criticism.**
5. **If you must criticize, balance it with at least one positive comment.** (e.g. “*I appreciate how you take the trash out each week. In the future can you remember to also wheel the trash can back from the end of the driveway?*”).
6. **Listen to understand, not to judge.**
7. **Use active listening.** Summarize your partner’s comments before sharing your own reactions or feelings.
8. **Avoid blaming each other and work together for a solution.**
9. **Use the Ten Steps approach.** For problems that come up again and again, use the *Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict*.
10. **Seek counseling.** If you are not able to resolve issues, seek counseling before they become more serious.



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#2477

Respect for the reputation of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury.²⁷⁸ He becomes guilty:

- of *rash judgment* who, even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor;
- of *detraction* who, without objectively valid reason, discloses another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them;²⁷⁹
- of *calumny* who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.

CCC#2489

Charity and respect for the truth should dictate the response to every request for *information or communication*. The good and safety of others, respect for privacy, and the common good are sufficient reasons for being silent about what ought not be known or for making use of a discreet language. The duty to avoid scandal often commands strict discretion. No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it.²⁸³

"We need to develop certain attitudes that express love and encourage authentic dialogue. Take time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say. It requires the self-discipline of not speaking until the time is right. Instead of offering an opinion or advice, we need to be sure that we have heard everything the other person has to say. This means cultivating an interior silence that makes it possible to listen to the other person without mental or emotional distractions. Do not be rushed, put aside all of your own needs and worries, and make space. Often the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard, to feel that someone has acknowledged their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes and their dreams." —Pope Francis, "The Joy of Love"

PSALM 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

PROVERBS 18:13

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.

²⁷⁸ Cf. CIC, Can.220

²⁷⁹ Cf. Sir 21:28

²⁸³ Cf. 27:16, Prov 25:9-10



PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. — Matthew 11:28

IDENTIFYING MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

Do you control stress in your life or does stress control you?

Stressors are events that cause an emotional and/or physical reaction. Stress can be positive (wedding, job promotion) or negative (loss of job, car accident, major illness). But what is important is to be able to manage the many stressors in your life.

One way to manage stress is to prioritize the issues that are most important to you. Another is to decide what issues can be changed or resolved and which ones cannot. This exercise will help you focus on the high priority issues and those that can be changed (Box 1).

COUPLE EXERCISE

1. Select up to **four issues** that are the most stressful for each of you.
2. Review each issue and put it into one of the four cells below. (Box 1 contains the "Most Critical Issues.")

| | Able to Change | Difficult to Change |
|---------------|--|---|
| High Priority | <div>Box 1</div> <div>MOST CRITICAL ISSUES</div> <div>What changes can you each make?</div> | <div>Box 2</div> <div></div> <div>How do you plan to cope?</div> |
| Low Priority | <div>Box 3</div> <div></div> <div>Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?</div> | <div>Box 4</div> <div>LEAST CRITICAL ISSUES</div> <div>Can you accept or forget about these issues?</div> |

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Select one issue from Box 1 that you will work on together as a couple.
- Work together as a team to achieve your goals.
 - Communicate about the issue.
 - Use good conflict resolution skills.
 - Be flexible with one another.





PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever. —Psalm 73:26

BALANCING YOUR PRIORITIES

First, indicate how much time you “Now” spend on each of these areas. Next, decide on the amount of time you would ideally spend: “Your Goal.” Then decide how you can achieve your goal.

| | NOW (hours/week) | GOAL | How will you move towards your goal? |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|
| WORK | | | |
| Time on job/school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Bringing work home | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Commuting | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| PERSONAL | | | |
| Exercise | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Television | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Computer/video games | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Hobby/recreation | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Reading | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Friends | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Religious activities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Volunteering | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Sleep (hours per night) | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| MARRIAGE (Couple) | | | |
| At home together | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Activities/dates | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Discussions (minutes per day) | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| HOME | | | |
| Cleaning | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Cooking | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Grocery shopping | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Errands | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Lawn/garden | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Home maintenance | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| FAMILY (if children at home) | | | |
| Number of meals together | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Family activities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Transporting children | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Helping with homework | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| At home together | _____ | _____ | _____ |

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- What areas feel out of balance to each of you?
- What steps must you take in order for your goal to become reality?





PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. — Philippians 4:6

WEDDING STRESS

Differences and disagreements are as inevitable in wedding planning as they are in marriage itself. This is a good time to learn how to deal with them. Here are some strategies you might find helpful:

1. **Consider the big picture as it affects each decision.** Some decisions will be made consequentially as other wishes are discussed. For example, the guest list should be created early because it shapes decisions about facilities and costs, among other things. If one of you wants a tropical beach wedding and the other a hometown wedding, you can discuss these options in the light of other issues such as the fact both of you want your frail grandparents to come to your wedding. Seeing the larger picture can help you resolve differences.
2. **Ask yourselves who cares more about the issue.** You can decide to gracefully adjust your preference if your partner has strong feelings about an issue. You may prefer a small, intimate wedding but your partner has cherished the family tradition of a large wedding. Try setting a number that gives more to the person who cares the most.
3. **Periodically assess your wedding-planning stress and feelings of competency.** If your partner has not followed through on a task they were responsible for, or if you feel better equipped for a particular task, politely offer to help or take over (e.g., "I am interested in photography and have a light work schedule next week. Is it okay if I research a photographer?"). The key is to agree together on a shift of responsibility, rather than saying, "Since you won't do it, I will!" The person who has been relieved of one responsibility should then offer to help with other responsibilities.
4. **Teach and learn from one another rather than assuming the other "gets it."** Sometimes one of you will not see a problem that is quite clear to the other. You can both educate each other about your families and their traditions. The groom from a Catholic family should explain to his Protestant bride what is involved in a traditional Catholic wedding, rather than having surprises keep coming up.
5. **Consider whether deeper issues are underlying your conflict.** If you are doing your best to deal with your differences and yet remain polarized, look for deeper issues. For example, sometimes the issue is not about the size of the wedding but about a feeling of envy or competition because one of you has a bigger family or circle of friends. Sometimes the issue is not between the two of you, but between one of you and your family members.

The standard tools of effective communication taught in PREPARE/ENRICH are particularly important when there is tension between you. Examples are speaking for yourself using "I-statements" rather than attacking the other person, listening to understand before proposing solutions, and choosing the best time and place to talk about difficult matters. Your everyday communication patterns might be fine for everyday matters, but when you are negotiating a wedding, it's good to be at your best!

From Take Back your Wedding: Managing the People Stress of Wedding Planning, by William J. Doherty and Elizabeth Doherty Thomas (2007).



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT PERSONAL STRESS

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#301

With creation, God does not abandon his creatures to themselves. He not only gives them being and existence, but also, and at every moment, upholds and sustains them in being, enables them to act and brings them to their final end. Recognizing this utter dependence with respect to the Creator is a source of wisdom and freedom, of joy and confidence.

CC#2828

“Give us”: The trust of children who look to their Father for everything is beautiful. “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”¹¹³ He gives to all the living “their food in due season.”¹¹⁴ Jesus teaches us this petition, because it glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness.

“Accept the duties which come upon you quietly, and try to fulfill them methodically, one after another. If you attempt to do everything at once, or with confusion, you will probably be overwhelmed and accomplish nothing. In all your affairs lean solely on God’s Providence, by means of which your plans can succeed.” —St. Francis De Sales

PSALM 73:26

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8

Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

1 PETER 5:7

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

¹¹³ Mt 5:45

¹¹⁴ Ps 104:27



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. —Colossians 3:13

TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

1. **Set a time and place for discussion.**

2. **Define the problem.** Be specific. _____

3. **List the ways you each contribute to the problem.**

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

4. **List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.**

1) _____ 3) _____

2) _____ 4) _____

5. **Brainstorm 10 possible solutions to the problem.** Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) _____ 3) _____

3) _____ 4) _____

5) _____ 6) _____

7) _____ 8) _____

9) _____ 10) _____

6. **Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions.** Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.

7. **Agree on one solution to try:** _____

8. **Agree how you will each work toward this solution.** Be as specific as possible.

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

9. **Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.**

Place: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

10. **Reward each other for progress.** If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*So encourage each other and build each other up,
just as you are already doing. — 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

HOW TO TAKE A TIME-OUT

Some conflicts become heated as levels of anger and frustration rise. Rather than speaking assertively, partners begin to accuse, criticize, or yell. Rather than listening actively, partners interrupt, belittle, and ignore. Physiologically, the “fight or flight” response is triggered as each person goes into a protection mode with little or no regard for their partner. In this state of escalation, it is not uncommon to say or do things we later regret. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation leading to a mutually agreed upon resolution. This is when a “time-out” can be beneficial. A time-out provides couples with an opportunity to cool down, identify their feelings and needs, and begin to think productively again about how to approach the issues they face.

- 1. Recognize your need for a time-out.** Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Are you breathing fast? Are the tears streaming down your face? Do you feel like screaming or throwing something? Are you afraid of your partner's intensity? Do you feel emotionally closed off? Learn to recognize the signs that things have become too intense for you to have a productive interaction with your partner.
 - What physical and emotional reactions indicate you need a time-out?
- 2. Request the time-out.** Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like “I’m just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts.”
 - Remember to call the time-out for yourself. It is seldom helpful to tell the other person “You need a time-out!”
 - Suggest a time when you think you'll be ready to resume.
- 3. Relax and calm down.** Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog or a walk. Take a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while. Do something that will help you relax and recover from the emotional intensity.
 - What method(s) could you use to calm down?
- 4. Remember what's important.**
 - Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss.
 - Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling, and what you need from him/her.
 - Try to spend some quiet time considering your partner's point of view and what they are feeling.
 - Remember the two of you are a team, and the only way your relationship will “win” is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.
- 5. Resume the conversation.** Bring in the skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening and/or the Ten Steps for Conflict Resolution. These structured skills can help contain the intensity as you attempt to resolve a conflict. Honor your commitment to return to the issue when you are ready to have a more productive conversation.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. — Matthew 6:14-15

SEEKING AND GRANTING FORGIVENESS

Since one or both of you are Catholic, you have a great help in the area of forgiveness. You know that Christ loves and forgives you. And, you can go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) to deal with, and heal from, your sins and weaknesses. Even if you have not confessed your sins to a priest for years or decades, Christ is present (through the priest), ready to forgive, heal, and strengthen you. The graces received through the Sacrament of Reconciliation can assist you and your partner in seeking and granting forgiveness with each other.

All couples eventually experience times of conflict, hurt, and letting each other down. Sometimes the offense is as minor as forgetting a date or failing to run an errand. For some couples, the offense might involve a major betrayal such as infidelity, addiction, or abuse. Either way, taking time to seek and grant forgiveness can play a powerful role in healing and restoring the relationship.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of inner peace, and it can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

It is also important to be clear about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. Since it is sometimes unsafe or impossible, forgiveness does not always involve reconciliation. Forgiveness is not always quick; it is a process that can take time to unfold. Don't rush your partner if they need to spend days or weeks working through the process of granting forgiveness.

Six Steps for SEEKING Forgiveness

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will not do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Six Steps for GRANTING Forgiveness

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger. Allow yourself to feel disrespected.
2. Be specific about your future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to "get even," but insist on being treated better in the future.
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity toward your partner.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness to your partner.
6. Work toward reconciliation (when safe).

Created in part with content contributions made by Richard D. Marks, Ph.D., Marriage for Life, Inc., Jacksonville, FL



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT CONFLICT

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#1606

Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character.

You must ask God to give you power to fight against the sin of pride which is your greatest enemy – the root of all that is evil, and the failure of all that is good. For God resists the proud. —St. Vincent de Paul

Virtues are formed by prayer. Prayer preserves temperance. Prayer suppresses anger. Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy. Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit, and raises man to Heaven. —St. Ephraem

PROVERBS 14:29

People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

EPHESIANS 4:26

And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. — 1 Timothy 6:6-7

THE CHALLENGES OF MONEY

The joining of two individuals is the joining of two different orientations to money. Our early experiences help shape our values about money. Money operates metaphorically in our lives, representing many other things such as security, nurturance, opportunity, trust, and the relationship between dependence and independence. Little wonder then that money is a major cause of conflict and a multilayered problem for married couples.

The Meaning of Money Exercise

In this exercise you will assess and then discuss your orientation toward money. The advantage of understanding your partner's money orientation is you can then capitalize on and balance each other's strengths.

Priorities Exercise

Recognizing how we spend and allocate our money helps us discover our priorities. Your spending habits might not reflect the priorities you'd like to have. Reality is that priorities and spending patterns can change. Use the Priorities exercise to discover, discuss, and start putting your money where your heart is.

Setting Financial Goals Exercise

Often goals are an extension of money orientations and should be considered together. The partner who is oriented to security is more apt to have financial goals around savings than the partner whose money orientation is centered around enjoyment. Create, discuss, and share financial goals in the Financial Goals exercise.

Creating a Budget Exercise

Budgeting is the process of allocating expenses on a regular basis. Budgeting puts you in control of your spending—a process that can be very empowering in a culture where we are constantly enticed to spend money. One good way to create a budget is to keep track of everything you spend money on for 1–3 months, and then average your expenditures per category. Complete the Budget Worksheet as your workable budget, making sure to allot a monthly amount into 'savings'.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:19

THE MEANING OF MONEY

Use the 1-5 scale to respond to each of the statements below.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Undecided 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. I look up to people who have been very financially successful.
- _____ 2. In making a major purchase, I consider what others will think of my choice.
- _____ 3. Having high quality things reflects well on me.
- _____ 4. It is important for me to maintain a lifestyle similar to or better than that of my peers.
- _____ 5. Having some money in savings is very important to me.
- _____ 6. I would rather have extra money in the bank than some new purchase.
- _____ 7. I prefer safe investing with a moderate return versus high-risk investing with potentially high returns.
- _____ 8. I feel more secure when I know we have enough money for our bills.
- _____ 9. I really enjoy shopping and buying new things.
- _____ 10. People who have more money have more fun.
- _____ 11. I really enjoy spending money on myself and on others.
- _____ 12. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure helps.
- _____ 13. He or she who controls the purse strings calls the shots.
- _____ 14. I would be uncomfortable putting all my money into a joint account.
- _____ 15. One of the important benefits of money is the ability to influence others.
- _____ 16. I think we each should control the money we earn.

Scoring and Interpretation

After taking the quiz, add up your answers to the four questions for each category and record your scores below. Scores for each category can range from 4 to 20, with a high score indicating more agreement with that approach. It is possible to have high or low scores in more than one category. General guidelines for interpreting your scores appear in the box below.

| Category | Add Items | Your Score | Interpretation of Score |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|-------------------------|
| Money as status | 1–4 | _____ | _____ |
| Money as security | 5–8 | _____ | _____ |
| Money as enjoyment | 9–12 | _____ | _____ |
| Money as control | 13–16 | _____ | _____ |

| Score | Interpretation |
|-------|----------------|
| 17–20 | Very high |
| 13–16 | High |
| 9–12 | Moderate |
| 4–8 | Low |

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- In what ways do you value money similarly?
- In what ways do you value money differently?





FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

*You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.
— Matthew 6:24b*

PRIORITIES: PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HEART IS

What we spend our money on should be a reflection of our priorities. Discover and discuss your priorities as a couple and if your spending and saving habits are working to bring more joy in your life.

Take turns identifying where your priorities land for each of the following categories. Use a ○ and △ to distinguish between your responses.

Housing

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
rent a studio apartment *own a 2BR home* *own a 4BR home with a 3-car garage*

Groceries

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
ramen noodles *spaghetti and meatballs* *all organic, all the time*

Transportation

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
bike or walk *1 car* *at least 2 new cars*

Travel

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
camping *Holiday Inn* *five-star suite*

Credit Cards

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
pay minimum due *carry occasional balance* *no balance ever*

Exercise

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
basement dumbbells *YMCA membership* *personal trainer*

Dining Out

_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
only special occasions *1-2 times a week* *Rarely eat at home*

[cont'd on next page]



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. — Proverbs 3:9

PRIORITIES: PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HEART IS

COUPLE DISCUSSION



Look at each of the categories in the Priorities exercise on the previous page and how you each responded.

- Where are you aligned?
Looking at priorities where you both answered 4's or 5's, talk about why these are important to you.
- Where are you not aligned?
Talk about why you feel the way you do about the categories where you didn't have the same answer. Practice active listening and repeat back each other's responses.

Do your money habits match your priorities?

- Looking at these categories, identify where you are aligned on the level of priority.
- Do your current spending habits reflect that priority?
- Are you putting money toward high-priority categories and putting less or no money toward low-priority categories?

Example: Fitness and living a healthy lifestyle is very important to both us, so paying for a gym membership is an important expense that we want to make sure is part of our monthly budget.

- Where are your spending habits and priorities **not** aligned?

Example: We both agree that we don't want to carry a balance on our credit cards, but have not made it a priority to pay off our debt.

Put your money where your heart is.

- Identify one thing, as a couple, you would like to try and do differently based on this activity.
- How are you going to take action on that one thing?

This exercise was provided by The Love & Money Project™ for the PREPARE/ENRICH Workbook for Couples. For more resources go to www.loveandmoney.com

Go to www.loveandmoney.com, create your free profile and get free access to the Family Bill Tracker and other tools under "My Products – Better Halves."



IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL GOALS

Couples argue about finances more than any other topic. Regardless of how much or how little money a couple has, deciding what to purchase and how to spend their money is problematic for most couples.

Typically, most couples focus on only short-term financial goals like: "Today I will pay \$100 on my credit card bill." But short-term goals should also take into consideration your long-term goals like: "We want to save enough to make a down payment on a house."

One way to reduce the amount of conflict regarding finances is for you and your partner to discuss and decide on your short-term and long-term financial goals. Setting common goals as a couple can increase your sense of teamwork and collaboration in this complex area of finances.

Identifying and Deciding on Your Financial Goals

Each person should individually brainstorm their short-term and long-term financial goals and then share them with each other. Short-term goals should be what you can achieve in six months to one year. Long term goals might be achieved from one to five years. Remember, your goals should be realistic, clear and specific.

Short-Term Goals (six months to one year)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long-Term Goals (one to five years)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Share your lists with one another.
- What do they have in common? Where are they different?
- Decide together as a couple on your common goals.
- Talk about how you can each contribute to achieving these goals.
- Revisit them from time to time so you stay on track.





FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Wealth from hard work grows over time.
– Proverbs 13:11b

BUDGET WORKSHEET

| Monthly Take-Home Income | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Partner 1 | | | |
| Partner 2 | | | |
| Couple Total | | | |
| Monthly Expenses | | | |
| | Category | Current Spending | Future Budget Plan |
| Giving | Contributions/Tithe | | |
| Saving | Emergency | | |
| | Retirement/Future Projects, etc. | | |
| Housing | Rent/Mortgage | | |
| | Utilities | | |
| Loans/Debt | Auto | | |
| | School | | |
| | Credit Cards | | |
| Car | Gas | | |
| | Repairs/Maintenance | | |
| Food | Eating Out | | |
| | Eating at Home | | |
| Health Care | Doctors/Medicines, etc. | | |
| Insurance | Medical/Dental/Vision | | |
| | Car | | |
| | Home/Life/Disability | | |
| Clothing | Purchasing/Repair/Maintenance | | |
| Personal Goods/Care | Supplies/Styling, etc. | | |
| Household Supplies | Furniture/Goods/Supplies, etc. | | |
| Services | Phone/Cable/Internet | | |
| | Trash | | |
| | Childcare | | |
| | Education | | |
| Other Expenses | Children's Activities | | |
| | Gifts | | |
| | Entertainment | | |
| | Travel/Vacation | | |
| | Child Support | | |
| | Memberships | | |
| | Other: | | |
| | Other: | | |
| Total Couple Income | | | |
| Total Expenses | | | |
| Surplus or Deficit | | | |



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT FINANCES & MONEY

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#2536

The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids *avarice* arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods³²¹

All the wealth in the world cannot be compared with the happiness of living together happily united.

—Blessed Margaret d'Youville

Earthly riches are like the reed. Its roots are sunk in the swamp, and its exterior is fair to behold; but inside it is hollow. If a man leans on such a reed, it will snap off and pierce his soul. —St. Anthony of Padua

PROVERBS 13:11

Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.

HEBREWS 13:5

Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

MATTHEW 6:19-21

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

³²¹ *Roman Catechism*, III, 37; cf. Sir 5:8



LEISURE ACTIVITIES

*Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you.
Rejoice in the wife of your youth. — Proverbs 5:18*

THE DATING EXERCISE

If you want to keep your relationship alive and growing, our best advice is to date your mate! Dating will help you maintain a friendship—one of the best indicators of a successful, long-term marriage. The habit of dating is the catalyst for building your couple friendship and staying emotionally connected through the coming years. This exercise will help you establish, reestablish, or reinforce the dating habit.

1. Separately write down your answers to the following questions.

- As you think about the life of your relationship, what have been your most favorite dates?
- What do you enjoy doing together? (sports, hobbies, interests, and recreational activities)
- What are some things you would like to learn or pursue together? (e.g. sports, cooking, hiking)

2. Share your answers with each other and brainstorm a combined list of potential dates.

3. Evaluate your combined list and rank the order in which to do them. Use the criteria below to evaluate your dates. If your budget is tight, think creatively! You may want to recreate a favorite date when you made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and had a picnic in the park.

- Time required (for instance, 1 hour, 2 hours, evening, afternoon, morning or whole day)
- Financial resources needed for date (\$ = inexpensive, \$\$ = moderate, \$\$\$ = expensive)
- Energy level (low energy, medium energy, high energy)

4. Now pull out your calendars and write in one date a week for the next two months. It takes three weeks to make a new habit (or relearn an old one) and six weeks to feel good about it. Date your partner once a week for the next two months and you will be well on your way to energizing your relationship with fun, romance and laughter!



SEX AND AFFECTION

*Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another
in marriage... — Hebrews 13:4*

THE EXPRESSION OF INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy and physical intimacy are closely related. Couples who have a good emotional relationship and feel loved and appreciated have the best physical relationship.

Affection is, to a large degree, a learned skill. Even those who seem to be “naturals” in this area usually had some training in their childhood as they saw and experienced the expressions of affection modeled around them. Those for whom affection seems awkward may have come from a home where affection was absent or rarely expressed. Either way, it’s important to discuss your upbringing and how it has affected your expectations in this area.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

The following questions were designed using the definition of affection as “any verbal or nonverbal expression that communicates love in a non-sexual way.”



- What does “affection” mean to you?
- How much affection was there in your families growing up (verbal and nonverbal)?
- How did you respond to the affection (or lack of affection) you received?
- How did your father show affection?
- How did your mother show affection?
- On a scale of 1–10, how much affection do you want in your marriage? (1—very little, 10—great amount)

For Premarital Couples

- What was the attitude toward sex in your family? Was it talked about?
- Where did you learn about sex?
- Have you fully disclosed your sexual history to your partner? If not, why not?
- Discuss your views on pornography.
- Have you discussed how many children you would like to have?
- Are you familiar with natural family planning as a way to achieve or postpone a pregnancy?

For Married Couples

- What are some of the joys and strengths of this aspect of your marriage?
- What prior sexual wounds or confusion did you bring into your marriage?
- Do you feel loved, cherished and nurtured through the marital embrace?
- If not, how could this be improved for you?
- How could you each contribute to making your sexual relationship more meaningful and loving?
- Are you using or have you considered using natural family planning as a way to achieve or postpone a pregnancy?



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT SEXUALITY

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

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CCC#2361

"Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death."¹⁴³

CCC#2362

"The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude."¹⁴⁵ Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure . . .

CCC#2363

The spouses' union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

"The mutual relations of husband and wife should flow from their common relationship with Christ." —Blessed Pope John Paul II (TOB Aug. 11, 1982) p. 309

"The sacramental sign of marriage...is manifested by the language of the body, a singular language of love originating in the heart." —Blessed Pope John Paul II (TOB May 30, 1984) p. 370

"The human body is not merely an organism of sexual reactions. But it is, at the same time the means of expressing the entire man, the person, which reveals itself by means of the language of the body." —Blessed Pope John Paul II (TOB Aug. 22, 1984) p. 397

HEBREWS 13:4

Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.

I CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.



RELATIONSHIP ROLES

Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. — Ephesians 4:3

SHARING ROLES

List your responsibilities and your partner's responsibilities related to the household and/or children. Your partner should also separately create the same two lists. *Note: For couples who are not yet sharing a household, complete these lists as things you expect to do in your future household.*

Things You Do (or plan to do) for your Household

Things Your Partner Does (or plans to do) for your Household

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- After you have each completed your lists, compare and discuss them. Any surprises?
- Are roles mainly divided by interests and skill, or by more traditional male/female roles?
- Consider for a moment how similar or dissimilar these lists are compared to what you witnessed in your parents' roles growing up.
- Discuss what each of you would like to adjust in your lists of roles. If needed, agree on how you might revise your current lists.
- Revise your current lists, finalizing an agreement about tasks you will each do in the future. Set a time to review the new lists.



SWITCHING ROLES EXERCISE

After you have each completed your Household Tasks lists, plan a day (or a week) when you can perform each other's household responsibilities. This Role Reversal experiment will help you gain a new appreciation for one another.



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT ROLES

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#369

Man and woman have been *created*, which is to say, *willed* by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. “Being man” or “being woman” is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.²⁴⁰ Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity “in the image of God”. In their “being-man” and “being-woman”, they reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness.

CCC#1609

...marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one’s own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.

“Love should be seen as something which in a sense never ‘is’ but is always only ‘becoming’, and what it becomes depends up on the contribution of both persons and the depth of their commitment.” —Blessed Pope John Paul II

“Charity may be a very short word, but with its tremendous meaning of pure love, it sums up man’s entire relation to God and to his neighbor.” —St. Aelred of Rievaulx

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

ROMANS 12:3-5

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.



SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." — Mark 12:30-31

YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Spirituality and faith are powerful dimensions of the human experience. Spiritual beliefs can provide a foundation for the values and behaviors of individuals and couples. People who profess a spiritual faith do, indeed, feel their beliefs breathe life into their relationships. Couples with high agreement on spiritual beliefs report much higher levels of marital satisfaction and closeness than those with low spiritual agreement.

Given the potential benefits of faith in God to an intimate relationship, it makes sense for fiancés/spouses to explore and evaluate their compatibility regarding belief in God. Couples with strong faith and practices say their faith provides a foundation that deepens their love, helps them grow together, and gives their lives meaning and purpose. If your faith is quite different from your loved one's faith, talking about the origins of your beliefs can help you understand one another.

COUPLE DISCUSSION



How much do you know about your partner's religious history? How much do you know about your own religious history? Family heritage lends a sense of stability and tranquility to relationships.

Set aside some time to discuss the following questions together and share your individual responses. (If you do not have the answers, ask other family members about their perspective.)

- What do you believe is the meaning of life?
- How has your understanding of God changed through your life?
- To what extent do you/would you like to integrate your faith or spiritual life into your marriage relationship?
- Do you have strong feelings or opinions about the religious upbringing you'd like to provide for your children?
- What is your family's religious tradition and heritage?
- What holidays (holy days) and rituals does your family observe?
- What holidays, rituals, symbols, meals, etc. do you find meaningful?
- How similar or dissimilar are your personal religious and spiritual beliefs compared to those of your family?
- How do I practice my faith now? (weekly) Mass? Prayer? Read the Bible? Go to confession regularly?)
- In what ways do I want to grow in this area?
- Do I want to know and follow Christ?
- How do we (will we) pass on our faith to our children? How can I help get myself, my spouse and our children ready for heaven?



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#1

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.

CCC#52

God, who “dwells in unapproachable light”, wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son.³ By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity.

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” —Pope Benedict XVI

“What really matters in life is that we are loved by Christ and that we love Him in return. In comparison to the love of Jesus, everything else is secondary. And, without the love of Jesus, everything is useless.” —Blessed Pope John Paul II

“It is better to be the child of God than king of the whole world.” —St. Aloysius Gonzaga

“Love God, serve God: everything is in that.” —St. Clare of Assisi

“God gave Himself to you: give yourself to God.” —Blessed Robert Southwell

“Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to Him and if they were to allow His grace to mold them accordingly.” —St. Ignatius Loyola

“For me prayer is a surge of the heart, it is a simple look towards Heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” —Saint Therese of Lisieux

³ 1 Tim 6:16, cf. Eph 1:4-5



MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction? — Amos 3:3

MANAGING YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expectations about love and marriage have a powerful impact on relationships. To a large degree, you will be disappointed or happy in life based on how well what is happening matches up with what you think should be happening. All married couples start out hoping for and believing they will experience the very best. Problems arise when these hopes and beliefs are not based on reality.

The following statements are common fantasies couples have about marriage. Read them and select the ones you believe are true. Take turns sharing and discussing these with each other.

1. My partner will meet all my needs for companionship.
2. Time will resolve our problems.
3. If I have to ask, it is not as meaningful.
4. We should live 'happily ever after' with no major problems.
5. Keeping secrets about my past or present is acceptable if it would only cause pain for my partner.
6. Less romance means we have less love for one another.
7. Our relationship will remain the same.
8. My partner's interest in sex will be the same as mine.
9. Our relationship will be better when we have a baby.
10. We will do things just like my family did.
11. Nothing could cause us to question our love for one another.
12. I believe I know everything there is to know about my partner.
13. Love is all you need for a great marriage.
14. It is better to keep silent about something bothering me than to cause unnecessary problems in our relationship.
15. Marriage is almost entirely about giving.
16. Marriage is almost entirely about getting.
17. God and the Church would add little to our marriage.
18. I can change my spouse.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Which of these statements have you been tempted to believe?
- If you agree with these statements, how might they set you up for being disappointed later on?
- How does believing or living out these statements keep you from fully loving and/or honoring yourself and your partner?





WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC# 1601

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."⁸⁴

CCC# 1638

"From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament."¹⁴²

"Mutual self-giving in the sacrament of matrimony is grounded in the grace of baptism, which establishes the foundational covenant of every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other, and with Christ's grace, the engaged couple promise each other total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life." —Pope Francis, "The Joy of Love"

"The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled." —Blessed Pope John Paul II

MARK 10:6-9

But 'God made them male and female' from the beginning of creation. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.

JOHN 15:12-13

This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

⁸⁴ CIC, Can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1.

¹⁴² Cf. CIC, Can. 1134



Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it. — Proverbs 22:6

COUPLE DISCUSSION ABOUT CHILDREN

For couples planning to have children...

- How many children would you like to have?
- When would you like to have children?
- What would you do if you had an unexpected pregnancy before you planned to have children?
- What would you do if you learned you were unable to have children (adoption? Church-approved fertility treatment?)
- Have you researched and considered the method and benefits of natural family planning (no harm done, increased communication, radically reduced divorce rate)?
- What are your expectations for the roles of a father and a mother?
- Who do you anticipate will care for your child during their infancy and early childhood (you, your spouse, a daycare provider, a grandparent)?
- How do you plan to handle discipline? Who will discipline (you, spouse, both)? Will you tend to be more strict or more laid back? Do you believe in spankings, time-outs, taking away privileges, something else?
- As a parent, what would you want to do differently from your family of origin?
- How important is it to you that your children be raised near your extended family?
- What values do you hope to teach your children?
- How do you intend to pass on your faith?



For couples with children...

- As parents, do we ensure that our children know that they are loved?
- Do we share parenting responsibilities?
- Are we generous to God in our parenting? Do we remain open to the gift of life?
- What are we doing to pass on faith to our children (Are they baptized? Do we pray with them and bring them to Mass and confession regularly?)
- Are we meeting all of our child(ren)'s needs (emotional, social, mental, spiritual, physical)?
- Are we teaching our children that the meaning of life is making a gift of ourselves to God and to others?
- Are they prepared to consider God's call to a life of service—in marriage or the priesthood or religious life?

Natural family planning (NFP) is the general name for the methods of family planning based on a woman's own unique fertility cycle. NFP is a scientifically based method of family planning that embraces fertility as a natural and healthy process (not a rhythm method). Furthermore, the Catholic Church teaches that NFP helps spouses respect God's design for life and love as they achieve greater intimacy. Because a woman experiences clear, observable signs indicating when she is fertile or not, couples who learn about NFP find it very effective for either postponing pregnancy or becoming pregnant. To learn more, go to: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/



CHILDREN AND PARENTING

*Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.
— Psalm 127:3*

STEPFAMILIES: CHOOSING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Read through these common myths, noticing if any of them resonate with you and your partner. Use the questions in the Couple Discussion (below) to guide your discussion.

Myth: Because we love each other, the other family members will also love each other.

Reality: Love and/or good relationships may or may not happen between stepfamily members. It will likely take time for emotional bonds to develop; some will bond quickly, others slowly, and it is possible that some individuals may never bond.

Myth: We'll do marriage better this time around.

Reality: Those who have experienced a breakup or divorce have often learned tough lessons from the past. While a new marriage involves different people and different dynamics, it is not uncommon for individuals to slip into old patterns and routines (e.g., being avoidant during conflict). Be mindful not to repeat mistakes of the past.

Myth: Our children will feel as happy about this new family as we do.

Reality: The truth is children will at best be confused about the new marriage and at worst, they'll resent it. Remarriage is a gain for adults and a challenge for children. Only after much time, when family stability is obtained, does the remarriage also become a gain for children. Be patient with them.

Myth: The stepparent(s) will quickly bond with the children and act like another parent.

Reality: Sometimes stepparents want so badly to be accepted they try to manage the children as a parent would. They may also try to show affection like a biological parent would. Children often need some space initially to build a relationship with the stepparent. It is often a good idea to let the child set the pace and follow their lead.

Myth: We will be able to easily form a new family.

Reality: In most cases, children didn't ask for this new family, they need time to develop a history and sense of family. Don't push to create relationships. It is often better to have minimal expectations of how relationships will develop rather than grand expectations which may fail to materialize.

Adapted from The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family by Ron L. Deal, Bethany House Publishers (2014).

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Which of these myths have you been tempted to believe?
- How could having these unrealistic expectations set you up for frustration and disappointment?
- How are you going to balance the challenges of a stepfamily and nourishing your couple relationship?





WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT PARENTING

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#1657

...the home is the first school of Christian life and “a school for human enrichment.”¹⁷¹ Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.

CCC#2222

Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God’s law.

CCC#2225

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the “first heralds” for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church.³⁴ A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one’s life.

CCC#2227

Children in turn contribute to the growth in holiness of their parents.³⁶ Each and everyone should be generous and tireless in forgiving one another for offenses, quarrels, injustices, and neglect. Mutual affection suggests this. The charity of Christ demands it.³⁷

PROVERBS 22:6

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7

And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

¹⁷¹ 1 GS 52 § 1.

³⁴ LG 11 § 2.

³⁶ Cf. GS 48 § 4.

³⁷ Cf. Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17:4



COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. — John 15:12

MAPPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In your report, there is a **Couple Map** (see sample on next page), which indicates how you each described your relationship, and a **Family Map** which indicates how you each described your family of origin. These Maps are designed to help you better understand and discuss your couple relationship and families. The fact that families are so diverse can add to the challenge of merging individuals from two families into a couple relationship.

Closeness

Closeness refers to how emotionally connected you feel to your partner and family. How do you balance separateness and togetherness? Indicators of Closeness are I vs. We, loyalty, and independence vs. dependence. There are five levels of Closeness. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of Closeness are most healthy for couples and families, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

Flexibility

Flexibility refers to how open couples and families are to change. How do you balance stability and change? Indicators of Flexibility are leadership, relationship roles, discipline and rules. As with Closeness, there are five levels of Flexibility. **Balanced levels** (three central levels) of Flexibility are the most happy and healthy, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (two extreme ends) are more problematic.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Compare how you each described your couple relationship.
- Compare your family of origin with your partner's family on Closeness and Flexibility. Use the examples below for your discussion:
 - Family gatherings during a holiday
 - Celebrating a birthday or anniversary
 - Dinner time / Meal time
 - Handling discipline and parenting responsibilities
 - Closeness and Flexibility in your parents marriage
 - Caring for a sick family member
 - Adjusting to a stressful change (e.g. a move, job transition).
- How similar or different were your families in terms of Closeness and Flexibility?
- How might the similarities or differences impact your current relationship?
- What from your family of origin would you like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- What from your family would you not like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- How satisfied are you with the current level of Closeness and Flexibility in your couple relationship?
- Consider ways you might increase or decrease Closeness and Flexibility (see next section for ideas).





COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.
Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. —1 John 4:7

COUPLE AND FAMILY MAP

BALANCED
 MID-RANGE
 UNBALANCED

| | | C L O S E N E S S | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| | | DISCONNECTED | SOMEWHAT CONNECTED | CONNECTED | VERY CONNECTED | OVERLY CONNECTED | | |
| F L E X I B I L I T Y | OVERLY FLEXIBLE | | | | | | FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS | UNBALANCED Overly Flexible |
| | | | | | | | CHANGE | Too much change |
| | | | | | | | LEADERSHIP | Lack of leadership |
| | | | | | | | ROLE SHARING | Dramatic role shifts |
| | | | | | | | DISCIPLINE | Erratic discipline |
| | | | | | | | | |
| VERY FLEXIBLE | | | | | | | FLEXIBILITY INDICATOR | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE |
| | | | | | | | CHANGE | Can change when necessary |
| | | | | | | | LEADERSHIP | Shared leadership |
| | | | | | | | ROLE SHARING | Role Sharing |
| FLEXIBLE | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | DISCIPLINE | Democratic discipline |
| SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| INFLEXIBLE | | | | | | | FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE |
| | | | | | | | CHANGE | Too little change |
| | | | | | | | LEADERSHIP | Authoritarian leadership |
| | | | | | | | ROLE SHARING | Roles seldom change |
| | | | | | | | DISCIPLINE | Strict discipline |
| | | CLOSENESS INDICATORS | UNBALANCED Disconnected | BALANCED Somewhat Connected to Very Connected | | UNBALANCED Overly Connected | | |
| | | "I" vs. "We" | Too Much (I) Separateness | Good I-We Balance | | Too Much (We) Togetherness | | |
| | | CLOSENESS | Little Closeness | Moderate to High Closeness | | Too Much Closeness | | |
| | | LOYALTY | Lack of Loyalty | Moderate to High Loyalty | | Loyalty Demanded | | |
| | | INDEPENDENCE | High Independence | Interdependent | | High Dependency | | |



COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

*So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself,
and the wife must respect her husband. – Ephesians 5:33*

CLOSENESS EXERCISES

Practical Tips to Balance your Relationship

If you find yourself “**Disconnected**” or “**Somewhat Connected**”, try some of these ideas to become more connected:

- Fill in the blanks. Use the following prompts (or some of your own) to discover or rediscover your partner’s innermost feelings:

“I feel happy when _____”

“I am afraid of _____”

“If I had more time, I would _____”

“One of my favorite books is _____”

“One thing I have never told anyone is _____”

“I get really embarrassed when _____”

“My favorite meal is _____”

- Say “No” to outside activities that take too much time and energy away from your relationship.
- Participate in community service or volunteering projects together.
- Start having a weekly “date” night.
- Plan and dream together. Create a list of things you would like to do in your life and share your lists.
- Take a class or vacation together.
- Find a hobby or activity you can share with one another.
- Compliment your partner.

If you find yourself “**Overly Connected**” or “**Very Connected**”, try some of these ideas to build your independence:

- Maintain, create and nurture friendships with others.
- Take a class alone or with friends.
- Volunteer for something your partner is not involved with.
- Give yourself some alone time walking, jogging, or journaling. Get to know and like yourself. When your tank is full, you’ll have more to share with your partner later.

Apply It!

Write down the idea(s) you want to apply, and when and how you will do it.



FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES

Practical Tips to Balance your Relationship

If you find yourself “**Inflexible**” or “**Somewhat Flexible**”, try one or more of these ideas to become more flexible:

- Share leadership and roles. If you and your partner have strictly defined roles and leadership patterns, try changing the normal routine.
- Put away your lists, calendars, and schedules for a day. Experience the day together without looking at a watch or clock.
- Brainstorm a list of your roles, and expectations for your relationship. Revise this list in a way that increases Flexibility.
- Switch roles with your partner for a week. If your partner normally does the grocery shopping, make this your job for the week while your partner takes over one of your jobs.
- Do something really spontaneous. Clear your schedule for a day or week and use the time to meet your partner for a romantic getaway.

If you find yourself “**Overly Flexible**” or “**Very Flexible**”, try one or more of these ideas to add more stability:

- Add more consistency, tradition and rituals. Research has found rituals and routines are associated with higher marital satisfaction and stronger family relationships. Rituals create strong bonds and build loving relationships and are organizers of family life. Rituals are more than holidays and rites of passage—daily routines are also very important rituals for couples and families. Daily rituals include mealtime rituals, wake up and bedtime rituals, and everyday greetings and goodbyes.
- Make a list of household tasks and who will do them. Negotiate these with your partner.
- Add more consistency to your parenting.
- Keep promises you made to your partner.

Apply It!

Write down the idea(s) you want to apply, and when and how you will do it.



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT FAMILY & FRIENDS

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC#2203

In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties.

CCC#2207

The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

“As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.” —Blessed Pope John Paul II.

“To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others.” —Blessed Pope John Paul II.

“Fly from bad companions as from the bite of a poisonous snake. If you keep good companions, I can assure you that you will one day rejoice with the blessed in Heaven; whereas if you keep with those who are bad, you will become bad yourself, and you will be in danger of losing your soul.” —St. John Bosco

PROVERBS 13:20

Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.

JOHN 15:12-15

This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.



PERSONALITY

*Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you.
Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. — Luke 6:37*

SCOPE OUT YOUR PERSONALITY

Exploring your personality and your partner's personality can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also point out challenges for couples who love one another, but have very different personalities and approaches to life.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

First, review the Personality SCOPE section of your Couple's Report.

- In what area(s) are your personalities similar?
 - How can your similarities be a strength?
 - How can your similarities create problems?
- In what areas are your personalities different?
 - How can your differences be a strength?
 - How can your differences create problems?
- Do the roles you fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths? (e.g. Does the person who scored high on organization manage the checkbook?)



DEALING WITH PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

- Don't try to change your partner's personality.
- Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you in the first place.
- Be responsible for yourself. Learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your relationship.
- How can you use your personality differences as a strength in your relationship?



WHAT THE CATHOLIC FAITH SAYS ABOUT PERSONALITY ISSUES

Marriage comes as a gift from the Hand of God.

—www.foryourmarriage.org

CCC# 1946

The differences among persons belong to God's plan, who wills that we should need one another. These differences should encourage charity.

CCC# 1643

"Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter."¹⁵⁰

"Help each other to live and to grow in the Christian faith so as to be valiant witnesses of the Lord. Be united, but not closed. Be humble, but not fearful. Be simple, but not naive. Be thoughtful, but not complicated. Enter into dialogue with others, but be yourselves." —Pope Benedict XVI

"Know thyself, and thy faults, that thus live." —St. Augustine

"Love contains the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of the other, and of his or her absolute uniqueness"

—Blessed Pope John Paul II

LUKE 6:36-37

You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:26-27

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

¹⁵⁰ FC 13.



GOALS

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. — Romans 8:28

ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS...TOGETHER

Clarify and define your personal, couple, and family goals for the next few years. Then share them with your partner. Remember your goals should be realistic and clearly stated.

Partner 1 Goals

Personal Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2 Goals

Personal Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Were you surprised by any of your partner's goals?
- Which goals are most important to you right now?
- What are the current issues surrounding these goals?
- How do your partner's goals complement or compete with yours?
- How can you each contribute to achieving these goals?
- What will be the first step to make this goal become a reality?





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