

5 Conversations to Have Before Marriage



Crucial topics to discuss with your fiancé before you say "I do."

By Vi-An Nguyen

Maybe you're in premarital counseling right now, or maybe it's the last thing on your mind. Either way, you already know there are a few touchy issues engaged couples are "supposed" to talk about before making it official. Well, we asked a few seasoned couples therapists to tell it to us straight. They mapped out the tough talks to have with your soon-to-be spouse before heading down the aisle, so consider this your guide to counseling yourselves.

1. You should talk about: Kids

If it hasn't already come up, now's the time to discuss whether you want children. But here's the surprising thing: You shouldn't stop there. Our experts agreed that it's important to discuss where you each stand on the issues that'll crop up once you start trying to have kids and when the tykes are actually around. "Are you open to adoption if it's necessary?" asks Rebecca Hendrix, a licensed marriage and family therapist in New York. And once you

have kids, "How should they be disciplined when they disobey?" asks Vivian Jacobs, a licensed marriage and family therapist in New York. Issues like these can become knock-down, drag-out fights later on, so it's better to discuss them now.

But it's okay to disagree on: How many kids you think you want right now. "Once a couple has their first kid, they'll have a better idea of how many children they really want," says Jaclyn Bronstein, a licensed mental health counselor in New York. Right now, the number isn't as important, Jacobs explains, "as long as you agree on a timetable -- how many years you want to wait before having children."

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You should talk about: Money and your careers

One of the biggest things married couples fight about is finances, so talk now to skirt arguments later, Bronstein says. Decide whether you'll pool all your money or keep separate accounts, and determine which accounts you'll draw from for everyday expenses and for big investments. And if one of you is a spender and the other is a saver, choose amounts to set aside for the future and for personal spending that you'll both be satisfied with. "No one has the right answer to what your money strategy should be," Jacobs says. "You just have to live within your budget, figure out what works for you, and be reasonable and communicate." On the same note, talk about your career plans. Where do you want to be in five years? How do you see your 9-to-5 -- and your salary -- evolving over your lifetime? Getting both your expectations in line with reality will cut down on money-related arguments later, Jacobs says.

But it's okay to disagree on: How many hours you should be pulling at work right now. "If someone has a busy job and works 12- or 14-hour days, that might be a big issue at the beginning of a marriage," Bronstein says. "But maybe they agree that getting financially stable is more important in the long run." That's a trade-off that works, she says.

3. You should talk about: Religion and values

Our counselors all brought up faith and moral values -- they might not seem like a big deal now, but religion and morals play a bigger role in marriage than some couples expect. "For a lot of people, fights happen when the other person turns out to be more religious than they thought," says Bronstein. Adds Jacobs, "You might go into marriage not caring, but the problems start as the children arrive and you're deciding how to raise them." So talk about your faith, and how you see it affecting your shared life, right now.

But it's okay to disagree on: Issues with your in-laws. Those family matters are common hiccups in any marriage and they're survivable. For example, "You can agree that it's okay he goes to see his parents and it's okay that you don't come every time," Jacobs says. The crucial part is that neither of you feels like the in-laws get priority over you, she says.

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4. You should talk about: How you'll handle fights

Arguments are inevitable, but our experts agreed that it's how couples handle them that determines whether they'll get through the fights. "Make sure you understand each other's way of managing conflict," Hendrix says. She suggests thinking back to a recent fight: What happened? "Did one person refuse to talk, while the other

couldn't sleep without resolving the issue?" she asks. Whatever your argument style is, hash out what counts as acceptable fight behavior and what's off-limits. "Tweak how you handle arguments to accommodate each other. If she doesn't like to talk about it at 2 a.m., learn to pull back a little," Hendrix advises.

But it's okay to disagree on: The little things. "People are going to disagree about how to run the house, chores, who cleans the bathroom," Hendrix says. "But those are the kinds of things that people can, if they work on their communication style, work through."

5. You should talk about: Your deal breakers and your bucket lists

If there's anything else that you know will drive you nuts in a marriage, it's better to chat about it sooner rather than later. "Let your partner know that you won't be able to tolerate it if he's always flirtatious with other women or if she blows all the money at Atlantic City," says Jacobs. On the other hand, you should also be up front about the big life goals you're dying to accomplish. Aiming to live in another country or own your own business someday? "Make sure your partner knows about that dream and is open to it," Hendrix says.

But it's okay to disagree on: Your hobbies and pastimes. "If your partner isn't into one of your passions at all, you can continue to do it on your own," Hendrix says. The key is making sure that you're both okay with how much time you spend apart.