

Things Couples Don't Talk About...But Should



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Introduction

When couples are early in their relationship, they're likely not thinking about some of the harder things that may come up over time. As a result, there are many important topics that couples tend to not discuss before marriage or making a long-term commitment. Oftentimes, it is not until a couple comes into my office for therapy that they begin to have these conversations.

My goal in creating this resource is to present some of these topics and help you get started discussing them with your partner. Having conversations about these topics can help you understand your partner on a deeper level, as well as understand yourself as a partner better. The following pages each focus on one specific area and include some questions to help you get started thinking about and discussing these areas with your partner.



Disclaimer

As you work through the material in this resource, if you feel like you and your partner may need some support in having these conversations, consider reaching out to see if couples therapy may be a helpful option for you in that process.

This material is for educational and informational purposes only and does not serve as a substitute for therapy/counseling/mental health treatment with a licensed therapist.



How Each Partner Needs to be Loved & Supported

We all have different ways that we like to receive and experience love and support from others. It is not uncommon for these ways to be different for partners. But often each partner shows love and support to the other in the way they themselves would like to receive it, and are then confused as to why their partner may not respond to these well-intentioned attempts.

It is important for couples to talk about how they each need to receive love and support to feel fulfilled, as well as how they can best express love and support to their partner in the way that they need to feel fulfilled. Some elements to consider are how you need emotional support to be given, as well as if you would like advice when talking to your partner or just need a listening ear. The key is to set out concrete expectations so that neither partner has to guess what to do.



Questions

- How do you like to receive support (listening, touch, action, etc.)?
- What is an example of something your partner has done for you that left you feeling loved and supported?
- How do you know that your action has left your partner feeling loved and/or supported? How do you know when your partner has done this for you?



Decision-Making & Communication Styles

We all approach decision-making in different ways, and it can create issues when partners' decision-making styles do not match. It is important for couples to discuss what they need in the decision-making process, and what the expectations are from each other in this process.

Similarly, partners may communicate in different ways. For example, one partner may like to talk through an issue as soon as it comes up, while the other partner needs time and space to think before engaging in this conversation. Knowing this about your partner can help you understand their communication with you, as well as help you have a better chance of having successful discussions about issues that impact your relationship.



Questions

- What do you need prior to having an important conversation with your partner?
- How do you prefer your partner to initiate conversations about concerns with you?
- How can you approach your partner to discuss an issue in a way they will be most receptive to?
- What topics tend to be more difficult for you and your partner to discuss?
- What topics do you tend to make decisions on? Your partner? Would you like to see this change at all?



Roles

Another area that couples often don't talk about until an issue arises is what each person's role in the relationship will look like. Some areas this may include are expectations in roles regarding housework, finances, decision-making, and parenting. For example, will one partner be in charge of making decisions in some areas, while the other partner may be in charge of those in other areas, or do both of you want to be involved in all decisions equally?

When role expectations are not discussed early on, each partner may be silently carrying resentment that their partner is not meeting the expectations they had. But how will your partner know you have these expectations if you never make them known?



Questions

- How would you describe your role in your relationship? Your partner's role?
- Have you and your partner's roles changed over time? If so, how?
- What has been your example of what your role could/should look like in your relationship?
- Are there aspects of your role you would like to change? Are there aspects of your partner's role you would like to see change? If so, what are they?



What is Considered Cheating?

An important area I often see couples not discussing revolves around what is considered inappropriate behavior and boundaries when it comes to interacting and having social relationships with others. Specifically, what is considered crossing a boundary into cheating/infidelity?

Today, an essential piece of this conversation includes what is considered appropriate behavior on social media (see next section). These boundaries look different for each couple. But it is essential to talk about this early on, rather than after a boundary was crossed that your partner did not realize was a boundary because it was never explicitly talked about.



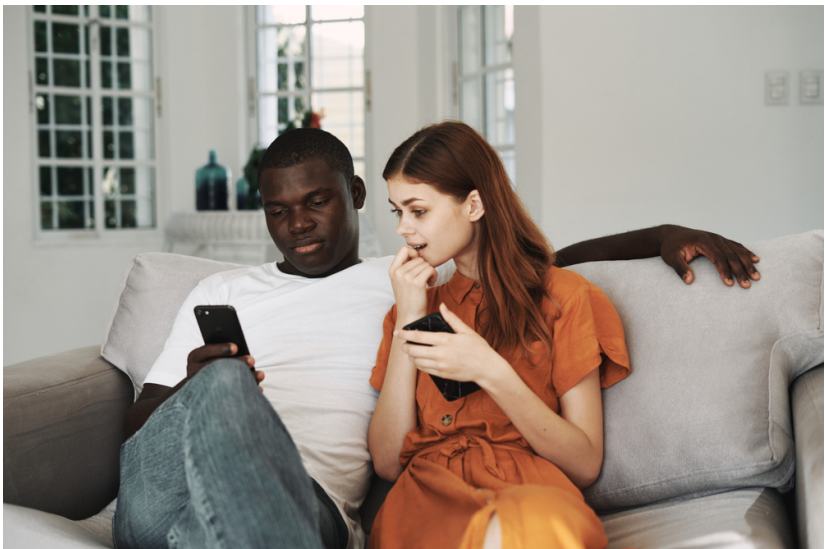
Questions

- Can you and your partner have friends of the opposite sex and spend time with them without your partner?
- Is chatting with people your partner does not know on social media appropriate within your relationship?
- How would you like the boundaries to change, if at all, when it comes to what is considered appropriate and/or inappropriate social behavior in your relationship?



Boundaries Around Technology

In our current times, we are more connected to technology than ever before, including our phones, social media, and email for work. It is important for couples to discuss their expectations and boundaries regarding technology use, including their use of it as a couple, as well as how to keep it from interfering with quality time spent together. Due to technology being ever-evolving, it is important that this be an ongoing conversation so that couples can make changes as needed over time as technology continues to change.



Questions

- What are your rules as a couple for having your phones/technology present when you are spending quality time together?
- What does staying connected with each other through technology look like during the day, when traveling, etc.?
- What are your boundaries around taking work calls/checking work email when with partner?
- What changes, if any, need to be made regarding boundaries around technology in your relationship?



Future Goals

An intimate part of any relationship is being able to share your desires and goals for the future with your partner. But oftentimes, partners never share these inner thoughts with each other. Having an open conversation about your goals (both for each other and for you both as a couple) can help increase your bond and help you understand your partner on a deeper level. Talking about these things is a vulnerable experience, and allowing your partner access to that part of you can be a powerful experience for both of you. It can also open up dialogue for you and your partner to find out how you can best support each other in reaching these goals.



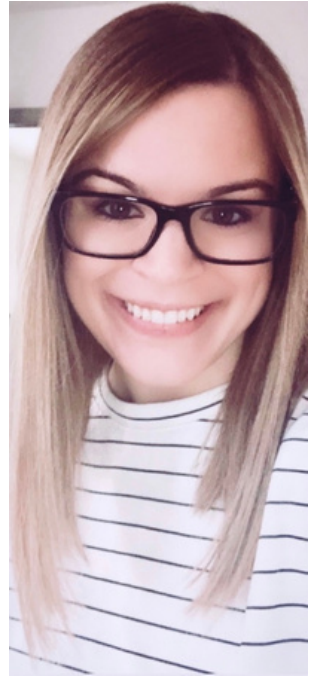
Questions

- What are your greatest hopes for yourself?
- What are your greatest hopes for your relationship?
- What goals would you like to accomplish for yourself in the next 5 years?
- Where would you like to see your relationship be in 10 years?



About Erica

Dr. Erica Carpenter is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, specifically trained in working with couple and family relationships. Erica received her Ph.D. in Family Therapy from Texas Woman's University in 2017. She is also an AAMFT Approved Supervisor and Clinical Fellow member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.



See Erica's website for more information about her work and practice:
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