

Explore Your Spouse

The process of exploring your spouse simply means that you ask questions about who they are with a genuine curiosity. You explore their past, their present, their feelings, their dreams, their emotions, their ambitions, and all of the other intricate details that make them the unique human being you chose to spend your life with. The best way to do this is pretty simple; by talking. However, knowing what to ask can be difficult for some. Pushing conversation beyond the surface can be challenging. So, below you will find a series of questions to discuss with your spouse. Pour some coffee, ask a few, ask them all in any order you like! Regardless, you're bound to learn something. My advice is to never stop this exploration even it means revisiting certain questions. Things change!

1. How would you like your life to be different three years from now?
2. Do you see your work changing in the future? How?
3. What is your opinion of our physical home? Would you make changes if you could?
4. How do you think your life would have been different if you lived 100 years ago?
5. How would you compare yourself as a mother (father) to your own mother (father)?
6. What kind of person do you think our child(ren) will become? Any fears? Any hopes?
7. How are you feeling about your job these days?
8. If you could redo a five-year period of your life, which would you choose?
9. How are you feeling right now about being a parent?
10. If you could change one thing in your past, what would it be?
11. What is the most exciting thing happening in your life right now?
12. If you could instantly possess three new skills, which would you choose?
13. When it comes to the future, what do you worry about most?

14. Who do you consider your best friends or closest allies? Has that list changed recently?
15. What qualities do you value most highly in friends right now?
16. What were the best and worst things that happened to you when you were a teen?
17. If you could live during any other time in history, when would you choose and why?
18. If you could choose a different career or vocation, what would it be, and why?
19. What is the one thing you would most like to change about your personality? Why?
20. Do you feel like certain things are missing from your life? What are they?
21. Do you think you've changed in the last year? How so?
22. If you could design the perfect home for us, what would it be like?
23. If you could live another person's life, whose would you choose?
24. Have any of your life goals recently changed?
25. What are some of your life dreams now?
26. What are your goals for us as a family?
27. What goals do you have just for yourself right now?
28. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
29. What have been the highlights and low points of the past year for you?
30. What adventures would you like to have in your life right now?

If you found the questions above interesting but would like to go deeper in the hopes of taking your relational intimacy to a whole new level, try the questions on the following pages. They are designed to build and maintain a foundation in your marriage that can withstand the test of time.

My Triumphs and Strivings

1. What has happened in your life that you are particularly proud of? Talk about your psychological triumphs, experiences that exceeded your expectations, periods when you came through trials and tribulations even better off.
2. How have these successes shaped your life? How have they affected the way you think of yourself and your capabilities? How have they influenced your goals and the things you strive for?
3. What role has pride (that is, feeling proud, being praised, expressing praise for others) played in your life? Did your parents show you that they were proud of you when you were a child? How? How have other people responded to your accomplishments?
4. Did your parents show that they loved you? How? Was affection readily expressed in your family? If not, what are the effects and implications of this for your marriage?
5. What role does pride in your accomplishments play in your marriage? What role do your own strivings have in your marriage? What do you want your partner to know and understand about these aspects of yourself, your past, present, and plans for the future? How do you show pride in each other?

Injuries and Healing

1. What difficult events or periods have you gone through? Write about any significant psychological insults and injuries you have sustained, your losses, disappointments, trials, and tribulations. Include periods of stress and duress, as well as any quieter periods of despair, hopelessness, and loneliness. Also include any deep traumas you have undergone as a child or adult. For example, harmful relationships, humiliating events, even molestation, abuse, rape, or torture.
2. How have you survived these traumas? What are their lasting effects on you?
3. How did you strengthen and heal yourself? How did you redress your grievances? How did you revive and restore yourself?
4. How did you gird and protect yourself against this ever happening again?
5. How do these injuries and the ways you protect and heal yourself affect your marriage today? What do you want your partner to know and understand about these aspects of yourself?

My Emotional World

1. How did your family express the following when you were a child:
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Fear

- Affection
 - Interest in one another
 - Pride in one another
2. During your childhood, did your family have to cope with a particular emotional problem, such as aggression between parents, a depressed parent or a somewhat emotionally wounded one? What implications does this have for your marriage and your other close relationships (friendships, relationships with your parents, siblings, children)?
 3. What is your own philosophy about expressing feelings, particularly sadness, anger, fear, pride, and love? Are any of these difficult for you to express or to hear your spouse express? What is the basis of your perspective on this?
 4. What differences exist between you and your spouse in the area of expressing emotion? What is behind these differences? What are the implications of these differences for you?

My Mission and Legacy

1. Imagine that you are standing in a graveyard looking at your own tombstone. Now write the epitaph you would like to see there. Begin with the words: "Here lies ..."
2. Write your own obituary. (It does not have to be brief.) How do you want people to think of your life, to remember you?
3. Now you're ready to write a mission statement for your own life. What is the purpose of your life? What is its meaning? What are you trying to accomplish? What is your larger struggle?
4. What legacy would you like to leave when you die?
5. What significant goals have you yet to realize? This can be creating something or having a particular experience. Minor examples are learning to play the banjo, climbing a mountain, and so on.

Who I Want to Become

1. Describe the person you want to become.
2. How can you best help yourself become that person?
3. What struggles have you already faced in trying to become that person?
4. What demons in yourself have you had to fight? Or still have to fight?
5. What would you most like to change about yourself?
6. What dreams have you denied yourself or failed to develop?

These conversations with your spouse are meant to give you the type of relational foundation that can withstand the test of time. Come back to them from time to time to see if anything has changed. You may be surprised at what you find.

Gottman, John; Silver, Nan (2015-05-05). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (p. 65). Potter/TenSpeed/Harmony.