

Preparing for Marriage . . .

Exploring Mutual Expectations

Names of relationship partners: _____ and _____

Completed by: _____ Date: _____

“Am I prepared for marriage?” This question is extremely relevant if you are currently considering marriage. A lack of preparation is an open invitation to marital disaster. A key component of preparation is “expectations.” Every human relationship involves mutual expectations, and serious problems usually occur when these expectations are not clearly defined, understood, or fulfilled within the relationship. Your expectations involve your needs and wants—those items that you believe should be fulfilled in your marriage. This worksheet will help you to understand more fully the expectations you and your potential spouse have of each other. A clear understanding of expectations is not within itself a guarantee of marital success, but mutual understanding will provide an important reassurance that your relationship will be healthy and happy.

Before you start work on the specific activities described below you would do well to read Dr. Baker’s two articles that deal specifically with expectations. The articles are entitled “Relationship Expectations” and “Unrealistic Relationship Expectations.” The articles can be found on his website “Roadmaps for Healthy Relationships” (Subtitle: “Relationship Travel Guides”). The titles can be found by clicking on the Resources/Published Articles tab on the Home Page. Clicking on the specific titles will take you to the full articles. The URL for his website is: www.DrBillBaker.com

Part One: Identifying My Expectations

Consider your personal perspectives about a marriage relationship. You have certain beliefs, hopes, and dreams about what marriage will be like. You expect your marital spouse to fulfill certain needs and wants which you have. You expect that certain things will be done in a certain way. You expect your spouse to fulfill specific roles and responsibilities. In the space below try to identify as clearly and specifically as possible the expectations you have of your upcoming marriage relationship. Give thought to all areas of a marriage, including the following items: communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, finances (wage-earners, budgets, savings, etc.) children/parenting, sexuality, spirituality, family of origin, social life, friendships, family traditions, household management (chores, etc.), and life purpose/mission.

“As I consider our upcoming marriage I have the following expectations of you and of our marriage relationship:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(USE ADDITIONAL PAPER AS NEEDED)

Part Two: Rating and Reviewing My Expectations

A. First, consider the expectations you identified and listed in Part One. Try to rank them in order of importance, assigning a “1” to the most important, a “2” to the second most important, and so on.

B. Secondly, rate each of your expectations in terms of realistic quality. To what extent is each expectation realistic versus unrealistic. Use the following continuum scale to help you in your assessment.

-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6 +7 +8 +9 +10
Very Unrealistic Very Realistic

(**Note:** Rethink and revise any expectation that you rated as unrealistic. The goal is to have expectations that are realistic; that is, they are capable of being fulfilled with a reasonable effort by your spouse.)

C. Thirdly, consider the extent to which you predict that each of your personal expectations will be fulfilled within your marriage relationship, based upon what you currently know about your partner and what behavior you currently see. Rate each expectation for “extent fulfilled,” using the following scale.

- 0: Will not be fulfilled at all
- 1-3: Will be fulfilled at a low level
- 4-6: Will be fulfilled at a moderate level
- 7-10: Will be fulfilled at a high level

D. Fourthly, consider your predicted reactions to what will happen to these important expectations if they are fulfilled or not fulfilled in the future. What emotions will you experience

(joy, sadness, anger, resentment, etc.)? What will you do to convey to your spouse your reactions and feelings? What will result from your disclosures? To what extent will you deny your own frustrations and pretend “everything is okay”? How much openness and honesty of mutual self-disclosure will you want to have with your spouse regarding these issues? What actions will you take to resolve your disappointments and frustrations?

Part Three: Finalizing Our Expectations

A. Following the completion of Part I and Part II you are now ready to share your personal expectations with your potential spouse. If you are participating in premarital therapy you could share and discuss your expectations in that setting, or at least you could get started there and then complete the process in a private location. Disclose your expectations one at a time and include the ranking of importance you’ve assigned to each one and what fulfillment (or lack of fulfillment) would mean to you. Continue the process until each person’s expectation list has been thoroughly shared.

B. A great communication tool for your sharing sessions is the Speaker/Listener Skill. This tool is described in the worksheet entitled “Using the Speaker/Listener Skill.” The worksheet is described and is available on Dr. Baker’s website (www.drbillbaker.com) in the articles on “Communication: Learning to Listen” and “Communication: Self-disclosure.” The primary purpose of this communication tool is to insure accurate understanding about each person’s expectations, even though you might not like or agree to specific expectations.

C. When you are satisfied that your potential spouse has understood your expectations you can move into the next activity: acceptance of the list of expectations. It may be that one or more expectations will have to be negotiated to accommodate the other person. If you hit a major roadblock in this negotiation process, you would do well to consult with the therapist who is providing your premarital counseling.

D. The last step in finalizing your expectations is the commitment action. This commitment to do one’s best to fulfill the other person’s expectations can be made verbally and/or in writing. Many couples prefer to write out the final listing of expectations, and they include a commitment statement at the end, followed by a place for each person’s signature and the date signed.

IV. Tracking Our Expectations

A. Thus far you’ve identified your personal expectations and have discussed them honestly and openly with your potential spouse. You’ve chosen to accept the other person’s list of expectations as they are given or after appropriate negotiations have been completed. You’ve made your verbal and/or written commitment to do your very best to fulfill the expectations the other person has for you. Now it’s time to develop a plan for tracking your expectations.

B. It is highly recommended that you schedule regular, periodic checkpoints for reviewing and updating your mutual expectations. A monthly checkpoint might be wise for the first year,

followed by a quarterly checkpoint for the following two years. After three years the frequency could be reduced to a checkpoint every six months. The specific timetable is a matter of your preference. Once on the calendar the checkpoint is to be safeguarded as an extremely high priority for the couple.

C. One spouse serves as the “Initiator” of each checkpoint. The spouses can alternate the role as the Initiator. The Initiator’s responsibility is to remember the schedule and to remind the other spouse a week in advance that the checkpoint is on their calendar for a certain date/time. The Initiator makes sure that the discussion takes place on time and will reschedule the checkpoint if an emergency prevents the discussion. If relevant, the Initiator plans childcare so that the two spouses can have time for their discussion without any interruptions regarding children.

D. Prior to the discussion each spouse reviews in private his/her expectations and rates the degree of fulfillment since the last checkpoint. The rating scale in Part Two (B) can be used in this assessment. Identify the reactions you have to the level of fulfillment (see Part Two, C). Do you want to modify any of the original expectations? Are there any new expectations you want to add to the original list? Basically, you are making preparations for the discussion you’ll have with your spouse at the scheduled checkpoint.

E. When the checkpoint arrives the Initiator begins the discussion by stating the purpose, that is, to review each person’s expectations and to share feedback about fulfillment and satisfaction. The Speaker/Listener skill can be used during this important discussion to insure mutual understanding of each person’s feedback. The couple can celebrate the expectations with positive fulfillment, and they will need to discuss further the items with low fulfillment.

F. A plan of action can be developed for any expectation that received a low level of fulfillment. The key question to be answered is “What can I/we do to increase the level of fulfillment and satisfaction for this specific expectation?” An unfulfilled expectation becomes a high priority because it will lead to future stress and conflict. In fact, every marital conflict is probably related to a specific expectation that has been violated or ignored. Both spouses need to follow through with any action plan that is developed. If you are unable to resolve the issue at hand by yourselves you could benefit greatly from consulting with a professional marital therapist.

G. Before ending the discussion the two spouses would do well to review the process used in their checkpoint assessment. How satisfied are they with the overall process? Do they want to modify the process and, if so, what do they want to be different about the next checkpoint? Positive modifications can increase the potential benefit of future checkpoints.

H. The session closes with a confirmation of a date for the next checkpoint and of which spouse will be the Initiator for that discussion.