

Defining What's Important

In the last lesson, you explored the fact that everyone changes. Part of life is adapting to these changes. The exciting part of change is that you know it'll happen, you just don't know how it'll happen or in what areas.

In this lesson, you'll explore what is most important to you. Some of these will be tangibles, such as how you spend your time together. Others are intangibles, such as respect.

Some Areas of Exploration

Having come this far, you've gained insight into yourself and your spouse. **If the two of you have delayed having a heart to heart discussion about what's important to you, now's the time.**

Here are examples of topics for discussion. Some topics may be important to one of you but not the other. If one isn't important to either of you, then you're all set in that area.

Important topics:

1. **Is monogamy important to both of you?** You may have an assumption regarding monogamy, but your spouse might not.
 - Earlier you explored the expectations of friendship. You may have discussed monogamy at that time. If not, take time to discuss your expectations.
 - This is also a good time to discuss expectations about pornography. No? Yes? If yes, what are you both comfortable with?
2. **Do you want to have children together?** In the lesson on children, you explored challenges when you bring children into the relationship. Do you want to have children of your own?
 - Same gender couples need to explore whether adoption, surrogacy, or sperm bank donors are agreeable to you both.

Women, of course, need to discuss if one will become pregnant.

- Different gender couples may also explore the same issues as well as whether or not the female will become pregnant.
- Religious beliefs may play a role. Be clear with each other on the various questions which can arise.

3. Do you have expectations regarding visiting with extended family?

Some people are very close to their extended family and others are not.

- Discuss your relationships with your family. Do you want to visit them often, just once in a while, or stay as far away as possible?
- Often, one spouse ends up buying gifts, cards, and staying in contact with both extended families. Be clear with each other about who has what responsibility.

4. If not married, do you intend to get married? It's very painful when one of you thinks you're headed to marriage and the other has no intention of doing so.

- Some people want to get married for religious reasons, others for social reasons, and still others for legal reasons.
- If marriage is important to one and not the other, you may need to reevaluate your relationship.

5. List other areas of discussion important to one or both of you.

As you discuss the important expectations in your life, put them in writing. Time can change your memory of what was said. There are healthy couples who have a conversation about their lives together on their anniversary.

What Happens When Expectations Are Violated

You're two imperfect people and mistakes will be made even with the best of intentions. What will you do when that happens? It depends upon what was violated, doesn't it? Be aware of what your non-negotiables are.

There are two common non-negotiables for most people:

1. Affairs
2. Physical violence

How the situation is handled may depend upon whether or not you're married. Many people have a religious belief that marriage is for life no matter what happens. If that is your belief, you might need the help of a third party to learn how to manage what has happened.

Know What's Important and What's Less So

Compromise and flexibility are part of any relationship. What areas are you willing to be flexible about? Are you going to leave your spouse because you discover you're doing more than your share of the housework... or buying most of the family gifts... or...?

Be clear about what's most important to you. If you find it difficult to be flexible, perhaps you would benefit from discussing with a third party why that's true for you. The lack of flexibility can relate to control issues because you don't feel safe.

If you find yourself being too flexible, as in you feel taken advantage of, use your Reflective Listening skills. If that doesn't help, an objective third party may be needed.

Summary

It's impossible to cover everything that's important to discuss. You have a beginning point for discussion in this lesson and throughout this course. **Know what's important to you and to your spouse.** That makes life fun, exciting, and keeps the passion going.

In the next lesson you'll review all you've learned in this module. But before moving on, please answer the following reflection questions.

Reflection

1. Make a list of topics you haven't yet discussed with your spouse but believe are important.
2. What's your ideal of your relationship with your spouse's family and their relationship with your family?
3. What are the non-negotiables in your relationship? Why are these important to you?
4. What are your spouse's non-negotiables? Why are these important?