



# Marriage Preparation

*St Helen's Church, Sandal & St Paul's Church, Walton*

# Introduction

Marriage is a vital part of today's society. At its best it can give a stable and secure environment in which two people can live together, sharing their lives and emotions at the deepest level and being at their most vulnerable. Children can thrive in the security of the marriage framework, knowing that their parents love each other, and love and protect them.

For a long lasting marriage there must be sacrificial love, not just superficial feelings that can change when the tough times come.

'Love is the commitment of my will to your needs and interests regardless of the cost.'

## ***The Marriage Service is full of symbolism and it sets out the reasons for marriage:***

- The first reason is to comfort and help one another, which involves themes of companionship and comradeship, faithfulness and commitment.
- The second reason is to fulfill the physical aspect of love which develops a deep union of the heart.
- The third reason is to have children and bring them up in a safe, loving and permanent relationship.

This involves a transition from independency to interdependency.

We hope these notes will help you to begin your married life together on firm foundations. To help you to deal with the pressures of everyday life and to withstand the storms when they come. The marriage relationship can grow and become stronger and stronger year by year, often especially through the tough times, if we learn to communicate, forgive and love each other regardless of the cost.



# Leaving

## ***Leaving must happen***

- It may not be possible to leave home physically, if you have to live at or near home initially
- However, emotional leaving is vital

## ***We need to look to our partner, not our parents/family, for:***

- Security - emotional, financial
- Direction - future plans
- Affirmation and praise

If the leaving does not happen this can be a significant cause of marriage breakdown.

## ***Important points:***

- Make your own decisions
- Support each other
- If you are worried or upset, turn to your partner first
- Don't undermine your partner to parents or in front of them
- Refuse to be divided
- Be kind but firm if parents find it difficult to let go

## ***Honour your parents by:***

- Showing gratitude - a thank you letter before/after wedding is appreciated
- Keeping in touch, but be careful - long and expensive telephone calls can cause arguments!
- Being responsible for parents but not to them

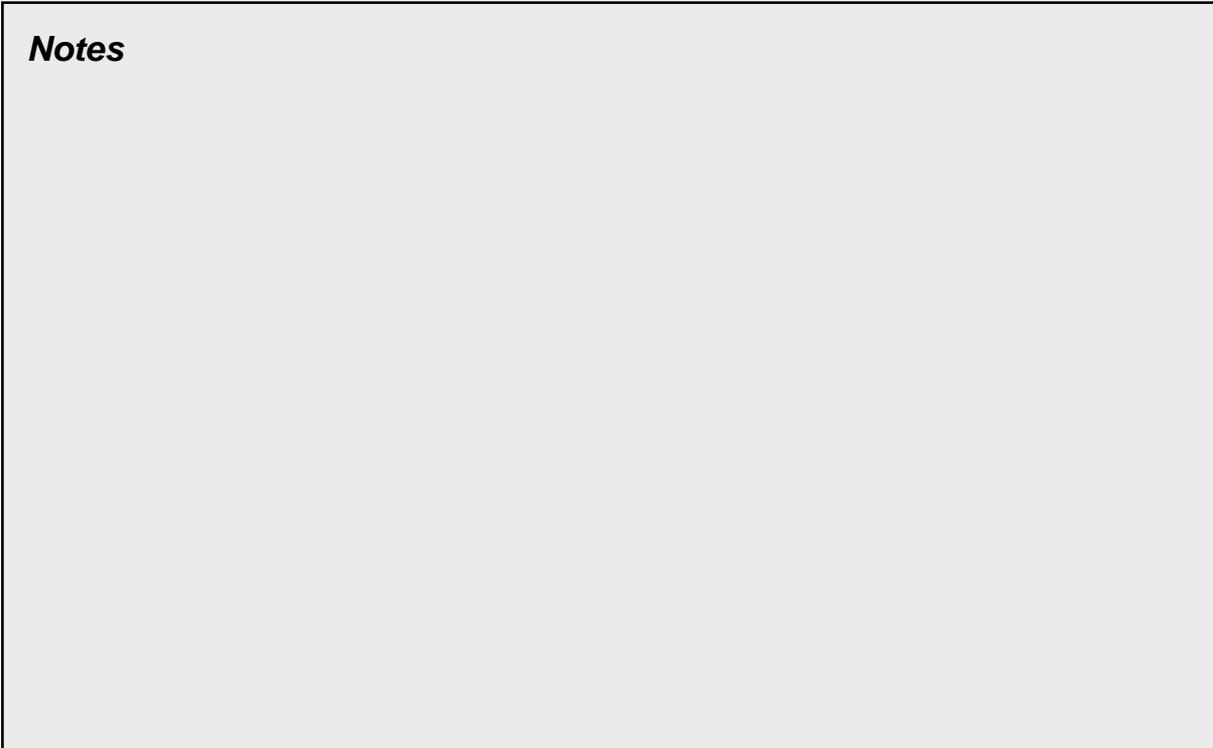
Communication is vital in building trust. If you can talk about any difficulties concerning parents or parents-in-law, and be united in the way you handle the ups and downs, your relationship will be strengthened.

'You're just like your mother/father' - only use this as a compliment!

Discuss as a couple: what possible areas of tension from the following list can you foresee with your parents/parents-in-law? Tick any likely ones and make time to talk about them.

- 1. Holidays
- 2. Frequency of visits
- 3. Christmas
- 4. Length of telephone calls
- 5. Finances
- 6. Interference with decisions
- 7. Other issues: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes**



# Cleaving

“Cleaving” in its Biblical context means being ‘stuck together’ like two pieces of paper.

Cleaving means building intimacy in every area of our marriage

This involves good communication on every level, emotionally, physically, spiritually, intellectually

It’s vital to give TIME to marriage

## ***Making time - getting into good habits from the start:***

- At the beginning of each day - briefing/prayer
- At the end of each day - debriefing/prayer
- Plan to spend one evening a week alone together
- Once every 2/3 months plan to have a day out to talk about bigger issues - money, holidays, future plans
- At least once a year - have a holiday

Remember: Things that crowd in may seem urgent but they are not always vital.

Don’t believe the illusion: “A slower day is coming” - it never comes!  
(‘Loving Against the Odds’ - Rob Parsons)

Love is a feeling - NO!

‘Love is the commitment of my will to your needs and interests regardless of the cost.’

# Communication

We cannot avoid communicating. Everything we **do**, everything we **say** and everything **are** communicates something.  
We cannot opt out of communication.

We need to communicate to build our relationship; to confirm and develop our love; to have our needs met and also to meet the needs of our spouse.

Failure to communicate leads to barriers and breakdown in our relationship. Greatest enemy of communication is lack of time; the 'Rat Race' culture. It is important to learn to communicate deeply in the good times so that we are equipped for when the storms come.

We communicate by using:

- words, facial expressions, body language, silence.

### ***3 skills of communication - talking, listening, understanding.***

1. **Talking** We need to remember that 'The more intimate the relationship the more powerful the words to build up or tear down.'  
"Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4.15) is vital. We should express our feelings truthfully without using the truth to hurt our partner. We need to use words carefully to encourage each other.

2. **Listening** This is not a natural attitude for most people. Too often we focus on getting ourselves heard, not hearing what is being said to us.  
Take time to listen - Proverbs 18.13, James 1.19.  
Beware of defensiveness and pride which may block our ability to listen. Avoid 'dialogues of the deaf,' ie. not listening to each other

3. **Understanding** Prayer of St. Francis - *to be understood as to understand*. Be aware that seemingly innocent words or actions from you may speak volumes to your partner. We need to get to know our partner deeply, past and present, to be able to understand each other fully.



## ***There are 5 levels of verbal communication:***

### ***Level One***

#### Cliche Conversation

Using cliches is like a safety screen. There is no personal sharing.

Examples: 'How are you today.' 'Looks like rain.'

### ***Level Two***

#### Reporting Facts About Others

When people tell others what others have said to them, but offer no personal views on those facts, like a newsreader.

### ***Level Three***

#### Ideas and Judgements

Real communication begins.

Someone is willing to step out from behind their safety screen and risk telling someone else of their ideas and judgements.

### ***Level Four***

#### Feelings and Emotions

The start of sharing feelings about issues. There can be no truly effective communication in marriage until both partners interact with each other on this level. There is no deep knowledge or intimacy in marriage until we know how our partner feels on vital issues.

### ***Level Five***

#### Openness and Honest

The ultimate level of communication where the relationship becomes one of absolute openness and honesty. All deep relationships, especially marriage, must be based on honest communication.

(See 'Marriage as God Intended' by Selwyn Hughes)

It takes an effort to communicate and share feelings. It is so much easier to stay at Level 1 or 2.

Do refer to the list of 'Conversation Starters' for subjects that you may want to talk about.

There are many differences: A man must think about feelings before he talks about them. A woman can feel, talk and think all at the same time.

Men have 2000 words to say each day, women have 6000 (approximately!)

“When a man speaks, he gives you a piece of his mind, when a woman speaks, she gives you a piece of her heart.” (See ‘Mars and Venus Together Forever’ by John Gray)

***Listening is a vital part of communication:***

- hear what is behind the words spoken
- encourage and affirm your partner by taking time to listen

***Tips for becoming a good listener***

- Look at each other when having a conversation - eye contact.
- Be close to each other
- Forget about yourself and your agenda
- Don't finish each other's sentences
- Repeat back what has been said occasionally to check you have understood
- Ask for repetition if you don't understand
- Don't give advice unless asked.

***If we don't listen it may be because:***

we're too tired, too busy, or self-interested, or self-pity gets in the way.

***Notes***

# Communication Starters

This is an exercise which can be used to start either conversations or communication through 'D & D's' (Describe & Discuss), ie. spending no more than 10 minutes writing down your feelings in the form of a letter to your partner. You don't have to both write at the same time but each of you needs to find a time when you are relaxed and undisturbed. You don't have to write for the full 10 minutes but the time limit is there so that you don't try to write volume one of War and Peace!!

Once both of you have written your D & D, exchange letters and read through your partner's letter, at least twice. Think carefully about what he or she is trying to communicate to you. Then lovingly discuss what you have both written to each other. Take time to listen and understand what your partner is saying.

Many people find writing about feelings easier than talking about them.

## ***What are my feelings about...***

TIME	Are we spending enough time together each day?
MONEY	Our finances. If we had £500 to spend, what would we buy?
WORK	Are we happy with the balance between work and home?
BEING MARRIED	Which things in our marriage do we appreciate most?
COMMUNICATION	When is the easiest time to talk? Are we reaching levels 4 & 5?
HEALTH	Are we being caring and considerate towards each other?
RELATIVES	Are we being responsible for them but not to them?
SPIRITUAL LIFE	Are we allowing enough time for God in our lives?
PHYSICAL INTIMACY	Do you feel I fulfil your sexual needs?
DECISIONS	Are we making decisions together; do we both feel consulted?
OUTSIDE INTERESTS	Is there a good balance, are we out too much?
PRIORITIES	What priorities does each of us have for our life and family?
HOSPITALITY	Are we entertaining too much/too little?
CHANGE	If you could change three things in our marriage, which would they be?

PROBLEMS

What are we finding difficult? Do we need to seek help?

REST

Are we allowing enough time for relaxation?

CHILDREN

Are we united in our plans for the future?

BUSYNESS

Is busyness a problem? Do we need to make changes?

DISCUSSION

Is there any subject that we need to discuss?

WORRIES

Is there anything that you are worried or fearful about?

DREAMS

Do anything, go anywhere; what would you choose?

Any other subjects?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Important: Don't use the exercise to continue rows or disagreements. Don't write when you are angry or bitter. If you write something which may appear critical, try and be as constructive as possible.



# Emotional Intimacy

'My emotions are the key to me. When I give you this key, you can come into me, and share with me the most precious gift I have to offer you, "myself".  
(John Powell)

Love is a four letter word **T.I.M.E.**

Emotional intimacy involves companionship and comradeship

The key to closeness is openness - choosing to be responsive and vulnerable, to share inner fears, disappointments, failures, as well as joys, hopes and dreams.

## ***Some vital elements in a marriage:***

- Appreciation - like rain in a desert
- Touch
- Verbal repetition of 'I love you'

## ***Men and women receive love in different ways***

'Direct appreciation of a man's decisions and actions and forgiveness of his mistakes is the most direct route to his heart.'

'When a woman is convinced that she is not alone in coping with and solving life's problems, she feels deeply comforted.'

(*'Mars and Venus Together Forever'*, by John Gray)

## ***Five Languages of Love***

(from a book by Gary Chapman)

We may be speaking excellent 'English' when we are married but our spouse might only be able to understand 'Chinese', therefore he or she is not able to understand what we are trying to communicate to them!

By finding out the language that our partner is able to understand, and learning to speak it ourselves, we will be able to convey our love more effectively to them.

(This understanding can also help in communication with our children, friends and family).

### ***Words of Affirmation***

Expressing verbal appreciation for the things we like about who our partner is and what he or she does, using encouraging and kind words, not demanding or critical ones.

### ***Quality Time***

Giving your partner your undivided attention, focussing on them, listening to them and doing things with them, undistracted by anything or anybody else.

### ***Receiving Gifts***

Gifts are visual symbols of love, of someone thinking of us. Being there when your partner needs you is an intangible gift of yourself that powerfully communicates love.

### ***Physical Touch***

Is a powerful way of communicating marital love. Holding hands, kissing, hugging and sexual intercourse are all ways of communicating emotional love to one's partner. We must not assume that the touch that gives pleasure to us will give equal pleasure to our partner.

### ***Acts of Service***

Doing things that you know your partner would like to do. Seeking to please him or her by serving. Expressing your love by helping.

# Physical Intimacy

Ultimate expression of love - giving oneself.  
Communication at its deepest level.

## **4 myths about making love:**

1. Hollywood is real
2. Great sex is always spontaneous
3. Our physical relationship will always be this good or this bad
4. We're the only couple who has a problem

## **4 truths about making love:**

1. This God-given gift is to be explored together not compared with Hollywood.
2. It doesn't have to be spontaneous, consider making time to make love.
3. Without nurturing it won't stay good, with counseling help and advice it will get better and better.
4. Many couples experience problems; it is vital to seek help.

## **There are emotional and sexual differences between men and women:**

A man tends to isolate sex from other emotions by placing it in one of life's 'compartments' - a time to work, a time to eat, a time for sex.'

A woman sees sex in a far wider setting than the bedroom - the total setting of every aspect of her marriage relationship.

(See 'Marriage as God Intended', Selwyn Hughes)

Important question: Are we getting sex or making love?

## **Do s and Don ts:**

Do talk about - what you like and don't like

- self esteem and body image
- which is the best time
- deal with the past, it will definitely effect the present

Don't compartmentalize sex:

- our sexual intimacy affects every other part of our marriage, and every other part affects it.

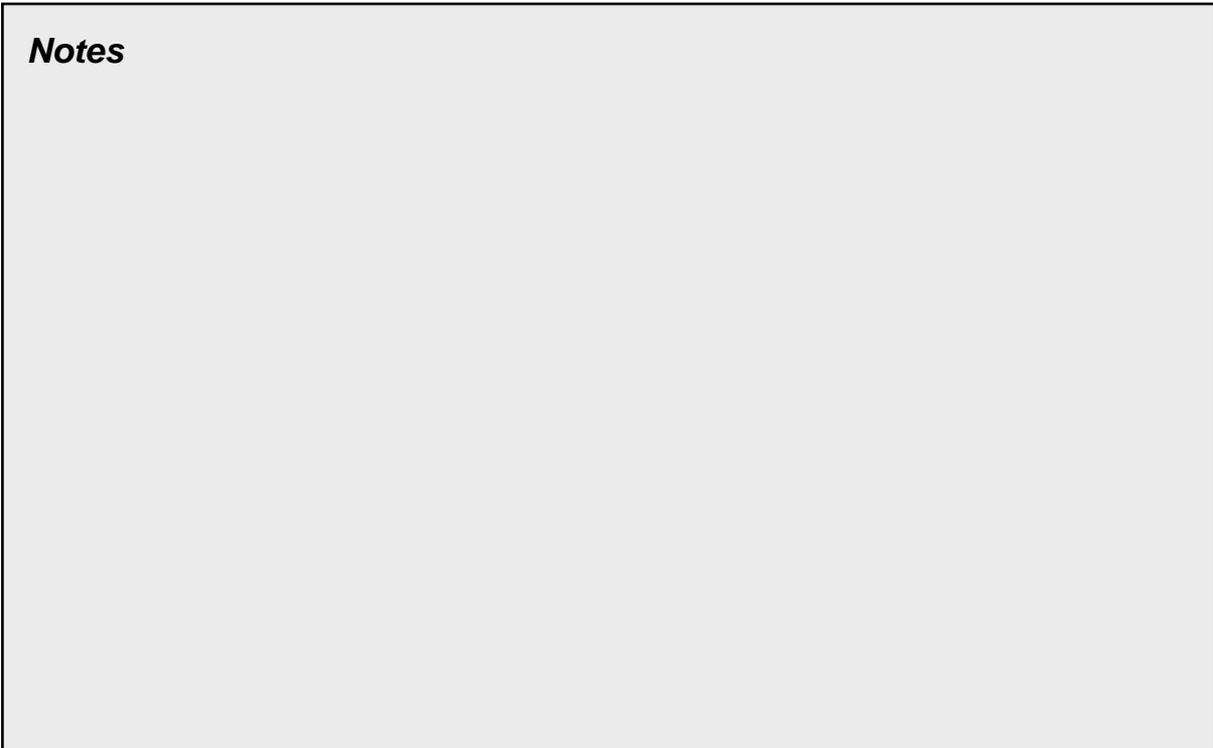
Don't use sex as an alternative to solving problems

Don't use sex as a manipulative weapon

Don't expect too much on honeymoon - you may well be tired!

'A Woman's greatest erogenous zone is her heart'  
(Loving Against the Odds' by Rob Parsons)

**Notes**



# Difficulties and Solutions

*A woman marries a man with the ridiculous notion that she can change him and he with the foolish idea that she will be the same for ever*  
(‘The Sixty Minute Marriage’ by Rob Parsons)

There will be conflict in our relationship.

## ***Difficulties and Conflict are inevitable - Combat is optional***

External pressures:

- anticipated in marriage vows
- ‘for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health’

Conflict will happen within marriage but it is important to prevent unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness building up over time.

Communication is the key.

Conflict does not necessarily lead to break down, it can lead to break through if communication grows into better understanding.

The areas most likely to cause disagreements in the first few years of marriage are:

1. Communicating with one another
2. Financial responsibilities and household organization
3. Difficulties with physical intimacy
4. Interference from parents
5. Organising time

If you are experiencing difficulties in these or similar areas there are some steps you may find helpful:

- (a) Identify the problem
- (b) Discuss your feelings, not just thoughts on the issue
- (c) Pray together about it
- (d) Seek advice from a mature couple who you can trust to give sound advice
- (e) Agree on a course of action
- (f) Re-evaluate the situation after a period of time

If you manage to agree about something that has caused a row in the past, without getting angry or upset, you may like to celebrate this in some way!

Here are some suggestions for handling a disagreement in ways that will prevent it escalating into a full blown row!

You will not remember every point in the heat of the moment, but as you become familiar with the principles and seek to put them into practice they will gradually become 'second nature.'

### ***Don't***

- Forget the issue and choose to attack the person
- Be 'Historical' by bringing up old arguments and dredging up the past
- Widen the issue
- Use phrases like, 'You always', 'You never', or 'Yes, but.....'
- Yell or interrupt, if possible!
- Involve your parents or in-laws
- Criticise your spouse in public
- Deny being partly responsible for the problem, or make excuses
- Use insults, blame, mockery or sarcasm

### ***Do***

- Find the right time to talk; the 10pm rule - no difficult subjects after 10pm!
- Identify the issue, and stick to it
- Choose your words carefully
- Use non-confrontational phrases, 'I wonder whether', 'It may be a good idea if'
- Express your feelings, not just thoughts and attitudes
- Hear your partner out
- Try to understand the meaning, and the feelings, behind what your partner says
- Pray for God's perspective
- Be ready to back down
- Resolve your differences before sleep, or lovingly(!) agree to disagree and make a plan to talk through the issue very soon
- Be first to say sorry, not 'Sorry, but'
- Remember the awesome power of forgiveness

# Roles and Responsibilities

No hard and fast rules - in general it is what works best in your marriage

## ***We will be influenced by:***

- Tradition
- Parents' influence
- Media stereotypes
- The different expectations we bring into our marriage
- Emotional 'baggage' from the past

## ***We need to:***

- Recognise our differences
- Talk through the issues and agree to clearly defined responsibilities; this avoids arguments and misunderstandings in the future
- Play to our strengths
- Help each other with our weaknesses

## ***Managing the Finances:***

- Decide who will take responsibility for monitoring your finances
- It's vital regularly to make time to talk about financial matters
- Write down a Financial Statement of income and outgoings (See 'Loving Against the Odds' by Rob Parsons)
- Agree a realistic monthly budget, and review bank statements etc. together regularly
- Be aware that most of us spend approximately 10% more than we earn
- Continually update the assessment of your spending
- Be realistic about how much disposable income you have

- Beware of plastic money and store card interest rates
- Make sure your lifestyle suits your budget
- Be honest with each other if difficulties arise
- Never hide the truth and try to sort it out on your own

### ***Marriage***

Partnership of two equals  
Leadership not Lordship

***Notes***

# Recommended Reading

**Preparing for Marriage** by Mike & Katey Morris  
Crossway Books

**Friends, Helpers, Lovers** by Ian & Ruth Coffey

**No Longer Two** by Brian & Barbara Edwards  
Day One Publications

**Marriage as God Intended** by Selwyn Hughes  
Kingsway

**Marriage Matters** by Joyce Huggett  
Eagle

**Why Marriages Succeed or Fail** by John Gottman  
Bloomsbury

**The Family Guide to Sex & Intimacy** by Trevor Stammer  
Hodder

**Loving Against The Odds** by Rob Parsons  
Hodder

**The Sixty Minute Marriage** by Rob Parsons  
Hodder

**The Five Love Languages** by Gary Chapman  
Northfield Publishing

**The Marriage Book** by Nicky & Sila Lee  
HTB Publishing

This questionnaire should be completed after 6-9 months of marriage. It could be used once a year thereafter!

# Taking Stock

Do you know what your partner would like to concentrate on and develop in your relationship? The following questionnaire raises subjects that you might find helpful to talk through.

	<b>More</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>As it is</b>
1. I would like time together....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I would like to talk about our feelings, emotions, joys and/or sorrows....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. In our relationship, I would like to make love....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I would like to share our hopes, plans and/or goals for our relationship....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I would like to share our household tasks, projects and/or other work....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I would like to share ideas and thoughts....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I would like to share what we each do in the hours we are apart each day....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I would like to share leisure activities, sports and/or hobbies....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I would like to discuss the way we earn money and/or how we spend it....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I would like to share experiences we had before we met (eg. growing up, previous relationships)....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I would like to share spiritual matters.... (eg. beliefs and experiences of God and the meaning of life)....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I would like to pray together....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# How well do you know your fiancée?

1. Where was your fiancé(e) born?
2. What is his/her favourite TV programme?
3. What is his/her favourite hobby?
4. What is his/her favourite piece of music?
5. Does your fiancé(e) like children?
6. How many does he/she hope to have?
7. Did your fiancé(e) have a happy childhood or not?
8. What does your fiancé(e) like to do on holiday?
9. What would your fiancé(e) grab in a fire?
10. What is his/her favourite colour?

# My Family

After filling in this questionnaire, take time to compare your answers and identify any similarities and differences in your experiences during childhood. The questions assume that you had both parents living together at home. You may need to adapt the questions to suit any different family circumstances. As you get to know more about each other's childhood, you will be able to understand the influences and experiences that have helped to shape you into the adults you have become. This knowledge will help you to understand each other's responses to the different situations and pressures that you will face together.

In my family:	Yes	No
1. My parents felt being on time was important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The house was always clean and well ordered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I was expected to help with household chores	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My father helped in the kitchen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. We watched a lot of TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. We hugged each other often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My father did the garden, my mother cleaned the house	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. We had household pets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My parents often argued	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. My father always paid the bills and controlled the finances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. All the family was involved in making holiday plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. We often talked as a family during mealtimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. My mother generally disciplined the children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. As a family, we were always short of money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. There was a relaxed, good-humoured atmosphere at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- |   | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 16. Both my parents worked and I spent time alone at home | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Showing emotion was not encouraged at home            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. My parents entertained often                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. I often took friends home and they were welcome       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. Visitors often turned up unexpectedly                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

# Recognise Your Differences

Write your initial and your partner's initial on the line according to each one's preference.

- Money** Spend \_\_\_\_\_ Save
- Holidays** Seek adventure \_\_\_\_\_ Seek rest
- People** Spend time with others \_\_\_\_\_ Spend time alone
- Sleeping** Go to bed late \_\_\_\_\_ Get up early
- Tidiness** Keep everything tidy and under control \_\_\_\_\_ Be relaxed and live in a mess
- Disagreements** Thrash it out \_\_\_\_\_ Keep the peace
- TV** Keep it on \_\_\_\_\_ Throw it out
- Relaxation** Go out \_\_\_\_\_ Be at home
- Punctuality** Have time in hand \_\_\_\_\_ Cut it fine

**Planning**      Make plans and stick to them \_\_\_\_\_      Be spontaneous change plans

**Lifestyle**      Active \_\_\_\_\_      Horizontal

**Reaction to Minor Problems**  
Calm \_\_\_\_\_      Panic

**Major Problems**  
Calm \_\_\_\_\_      Panic

# Roles & Responsibilities

Each write down up to six areas for which you expect to take responsibility:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1 ..... | 4 ..... |
| 2 ..... | 5 ..... |
| 3 ..... | 6 ..... |

Each write down up to six areas for which you expect your partner to take responsibility:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1 ..... | 4 ..... |
| 2 ..... | 5 ..... |
| 3 ..... | 6 ..... |

Each write down up to six areas that you expect will be a joint responsibility:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1 ..... | 4 ..... |
| 2 ..... | 5 ..... |
| 3 ..... | 6 ..... |

When you have finished, compare lists!

# Learn to recognise how each of you feels loved

***There are five simple ways through which we can show and be shown love:***

**Loving words**

**Quality time**

**Thoughtful presents**

**Helpful Actions**

**Physical affection**

Put the five ways of receiving love in order of importance for you.

Then consider which order of importance you think you fiancé(e) would put them in.

You (Number 1-5 1= most important)	Expressions of love through:	Your fiancée (Number 1-5 1= most important)
	<b>Loving Words</b>	
	<b>Quality Time</b>	
	<b>Thoughtful presents</b>	
	<b>Physical Affection</b>	
	<b>Helpful Actions</b>	

Write down three specific occasions on which you have particularly known you fiancé(e)'s love for you, and specify which Love Language they spoke on each occasion.

I have known your love for me when:

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

Now discuss this with your fiancé(e).