

Questions May Spare Heartache, Reduce Risks of Divorce

Couples who focus on romance without allowing time to assess their life together, may be setting themselves—and their marriage—up for failure. Allowing time to get to know each other—a courtship of at least a year or, better yet, two to three years—allows time for potential partners to interact with each other in all kinds of situations and to observe how the other interacts with family and friends, at work and in the community.

Relationships that began as friendships and evolve into a romantic relationship typically seem to fare better over the long haul. Prospective partners are advised to talk about their goals, values and expectations before making a commitment. Consider these questions about potentially troubling topics:

- How does each partner define marriage? What is each prospective partner's expectation for a marriage? Is marriage viewed as a lifetime commitment? If not, why?
- Why marry? Is one prospective partner looking for financial security or status? Is the other looking for someone to organize their life or maintain the home? Is the desire to marry driven by hormones—or a desire for companionship? What is the sexual expectation?

- Are financial management goals compatible? Whether a saver or spender, can prospective partners work out a financial management plan that covers the basics, saves for emergencies and the future, and still allows some personal discretionary money? Does either prospective partner have school loans, credit card or other debt? If so, what is the plan to pay off the debt?

Keeping debts hidden from a prospective spouse is certain to cause problems later on.

- Do prospective partners share a desire to have a family? If so, how many children would they like to have? Is each partner willing to share in childcare responsibilities? Or, is one partner expecting the other to stay home to care for the children full time?
- What is the expectation for companionship? Is one partner expecting the other to fill all of his or her needs? Or will the couple cultivate couple friends, while also maintaining friendships on their own?
- Are lifestyles compatible? As a couple, how will they divide everyday chores such as housework, vehicle maintenance or lawn care? Who will do the laundry, cooking or cleaning? Is it important for the couple to sit down at a table and use mealtime to share

news of their day? Or, is the expectation to eat in front of the television? Will they still plan date night? And, how will leisure time be spent?

- Are spiritual and religious values compatible? If not, is this a sticky issue for parents and families?
- How do communication styles complement each other? With disagreements inevitable in any relationship, have prospective partners learned how to communicate effectively with each other? Is each able to bring up a touchy topic—or issue—and guide a conversation that will lead to a mutually agreeable solution, either through discussion or compromise?

- How will prospective partners celebrate birthdays and holidays? What is the expectation for a vacation: a sandy beach or a family reunion?

- Should a couple live together before marriage?

While this is a personal decision, study after study has shown marriages of couples who have lived together before marriage do not necessarily have a better survival rate. Romance has its place, but couples are urged to focus on the relationship and shared values and goals to build a lasting relationship.

Be flexible—and always respectful. Happy ever after is what you make it.

Nancy B. Peterson
K-State Research & Extension
Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
nancyp@ksu.edu
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu>

Charlotte Shoup Olsen, Ph.D., CFLE
School of Family Studies and Human Services
K-State Research & Extension
Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
colsen@ksu.edu or 785-532-5773