

Ask an Expert – Ten Tips to Prepare for Marriage, Not Just the Wedding

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Many couples spend more time planning their wedding than preparing for marriage. Before deciding to tie the knot, consider these tips to help create a “happily ever after.”

1. Ask: Am I ready? The happiest relationships are built on a foundation of two happy, emotionally healthy people ready to take on the challenges of a new life together. Those ready to be in a long-term relationship have dealt with their own personal challenges and issues and are not looking for someone to make them happy or to “fix” them in some way.
2. Take time. Really getting to know someone requires talking (mutual self-disclosure), being together in a variety of situations, and time. Because most people are usually on their best behavior when they first meet, and it takes time for patterns of behavior to emerge, this process can’t be rushed.
3. Be cautious when in a long-distance relationship. While online dating is a common way to meet people, steer clear of commitment without spending plenty of time in person in varying situations. It is easier to present an idealized version of yourself from afar.
4. Play detective. Ask meaningful questions to help you know if you are compatible with the person you are dating. For example, check out these [10 Questions to Ask Before Saying I Do](#). To ensure you aren’t biased about how you view the person you are dating, consider how those you trust view him or her. Ask their opinions and be willing to

listen to what they say about warning signs you may have missed.

5. Get to know their family. Family dynamics offer clues about future behaviors. If there are concerns about their family or negative traits a partner has learned from their family, you may want to think twice before getting too serious. While change is possible, it is easier before becoming deeply committed.
6. Watch for personality compatibility. While most people won’t have everything in common with their partner, happy relationships often share traits such as: emotional temperament, sense of humor, intelligence, energy levels, similar interests, and how affection is expressed.
7. Understand each other’s values. Some of the biggest arguments in relationships relate to those things valued most because of strong feelings and opinions. Having similarities in religion, financial views and goals, and family goals are all significant factors to consider. Discuss these topics early on.
8. Watch for daily life compatibility. While it may not be romantic, the truth is that most time spent in a long-term relationship is in the daily routines of life. Consider such things as: Who will earn and manage the money? How will household responsibilities be divided? How will free time be spent? Aligning on these topics is important.
9. Learn conflict resolution skills. Conflict is inevitable in even the happiest relationships. When handled positively, overcoming conflict can strengthen relationships. Having a conflict plan can be helpful. Begin by setting ground rules: choose when and where to deal with conflict, be respectful, and practice good listening and communication skills.
10. Invest in your relationship. As with cars, relationships need regular preventative maintenance to run smoothly. Research suggests that relationship education (such as attending a class or reading a relationship book together) can help relationships stay strong. Consider what you will do as a couple to create a relationship that is “happily ever after.”

For class schedules on relationships and further tips and information, visit HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org and [Utah Marriage Commission at USU](http://UtahMarriageCommission.org).

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