

Ask an Expert - Four Ways to Manage Expectations in Relationships

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Expectations are beliefs about the way things will or should be. They come from the family we grew up in, the relationships we have had and the culture that surrounds us, such as family traditions, religious or ethnic backgrounds, media, etc. While we all have expectations, unmet expectations can lead to conflict, frustration and relationship dissatisfaction. On the other hand, learning to manage these expectations is one of the keys to healthy relationships. Consider these four tips.

1. **Identify your expectations as well as those of your loved one.** Unspoken expectations and those that you may not even be conscious of are often at the root of conflict. Take a step back to examine what expectations might exist that you may not have considered before. Consider the common topics of conflict.
1. **Be reasonable.** Step back and look at your expectations from another perspective. Is it reasonable for the current situation? Just because you would prefer it or it may have “always been done that way” doesn’t mean it is the best and most realistic solution for current circumstances.
1. **Be clear.** Express your preferences using “I” messages and take time to listen to your loved one’s point of view. We may not always agree with their expectations, but validating each other’s perspective can set a positive tone for finding a compromise that is acceptable for both of you.
1. **Seek for a win-win solution.** Remember, if the solution is not win-win, everyone loses. If a win-win solution does not seem possible, find a way to equally compromise or take turns compromising. Be sure to get back together after an agreed-upon

time to evaluate, discuss and make adjustments, if needed.

While unmet expectations create frustration and conflict, following these four tips can help provide opportunities to grow closer and build happier and healthier relationships.

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