

QUESTIONS (AND EXPLANATIONS) CHEAT SHEET

Why these sessions? We do premarital counseling to bring up issues that will be confronted during the marriage. Better now than during the marriage, during a crisis.

How long have you been together? Why are you getting married now? This is just to make sure that both are ready, willing, and able. No one should feel pressured or rushed.

What are you carrying into this marriage that feels like a burden? The thoughts and decisions about what marriage is or should be. This marriage does not have to be like before, but it will take work to make sure they don't repeat the same mistakes. Ask each to give you a short life story. It is for them to hear each other as much as for you to hear. Their baggage may be from an earlier marriage, or from their family of origin. Really listen to their stories for landmines.

If you have not been married before? If this is a first marriage, then one may have a well-developed personal lifestyle. It cannot continue just as before because there are two of them now, and decisions are not solitary.

If your religious/spiritual beliefs or activities are different, how will you reconcile them? They don't have to have the same beliefs or activities, but they do have to be able to support each other. They also have to see if this will have an impact on their children or extended families.

Are you willing to work on a Marital Statement? I urge you to get familiar with it and help them create their own statement. Encourage them to create it from scratch, as they invent their marriage and their future. Its purpose is to transform the context of their current single lives into a joyful and purposeful married dual life. It is important to distinguish this marriage from their previous marriage or single life and help them put the baggage someplace where it is not going to be a burden.

How will you blend your families? Some say this is the major cause of second marriage failure. Discuss what role they are going to play in or with each other's family. That's about each other's children and parents and siblings. Find out how they expect the children relate to each other. Find out who they will be obligated to support or care for, who will support or care for them. Find out what family obligations they will have and/or share.

Are there "items" you are bringing into this marriage that you want to have stay in your family? They may be dealing with heirlooms, or just things you are attached to. They may be dealing with money or valuables. They may want to give away things now. Make sure they are on the same page so there are no surprises at a later date.

What are your current financial circumstances? Here mostly you are making sure that they both are on equal footing in terms of knowledge of each other's condition. The other questions are to check each other's expectations.

Based on current circumstances, how will you operate your finances? There are just so many questions in this. Who will pay for what and who will be accountable? What will they combine, and what will they keep separate? Ask about assets, liabilities, income, and expenses. Make

sure they have a working knowledge of what is planned. Find out if either has an expectation of how much/how long the other will be earning income.

What happens when circumstances change? This could be loss or end of a job, or a transfer for a career opportunity. It could be illness or death. It could be a child or a parent needing care, or even moving into your home. They won't want to think about it, but it could be a divorce.

Do you want to consider a prenuptial agreement? This is an agreement that contemplates changes in their status and determines how those changes will be dealt with. Mostly it deals with what will happen between them both in the event of death or divorce.

What are your thoughts and goals in the areas of sex and intimacy? Are you more interested in romance or friendship? What are each of their expectations? Have they discussed this, are they on the same page? This is not just about how often they will have sex. It is about how they define fidelity and what is acceptable. It is also about how often they expect to have intimate conversations, and what secrets they may each keep.

How would each define having a good time? What are their needs, desires, expectations? What do they each do to have a good time? Do they expect/plan they will do those things together? What are they willing to do, just for the other?

How is your current health? Is there disease in your family? Have you made decisions for dealing with major illness or end of life? Questions are asked about current and future health. These are very practical: about medicines and doctors and long-term care. And consider what the costs of getting older are. There may be things in the far off, or near future that may be disabling, and they have to confront dealing with it by planning for it now.

What will wake you up each morning? This is a conversation about purpose, values, and meaning. It may be about the legacy they each want to leave. It may be about spirituality and faith. Is it OK if they feel differently about these things? Not if one wants to relax and travel, and the other wants to volunteer at a soup kitchen, and neither wants to give the other time for what drives them.

What are your plans for the wedding? This is the one thing they will usually expect to discuss. How do they each picture the event, how "traditional" do they want the wedding ceremony to be? This will be another entry point into discussion of religion and spirituality. What role will they have in their wedding leads into what role in their marriage. Just to be safe, you want to hear about the celebration as well as the ceremony.

How do you handle conflicts? It always comes down to communication. How well do they listen? How do they resolve/avoid conflict? How did they do it before this marriage? If your gut tells you they are not very good at it, you need to help them learn how to get better.

Do you want any referrals? Be prepared with the names of lawyers, counselors, accountants, or any other needed professional you trust.