

Before *We Say "I Do"*

The “Great Marriage” Interview Activity

One thing I’ve learned about married couples is that they love to give advice, especially to engaged and dating couples. They’ve been through the tough stuff, and they have a lot of wisdom to share. This activity gives you an opportunity to reach out to a few couples and learn from their example and wisdom. To get started, follow the steps below. There is not one exact way to carry out this activity, but I give you a suggested set of steps to get you started.

Step 1: Brainstorm a List

Together, write down names of as many couples you can think of that you are fairly sure have a very strong marriage. This could be your parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and close friends. This list should contain newly married couples as well as couples who have been together for 10 and 20 plus years. I would avoid choosing couples who have been married for less than six months because they are likely still in the “honeymoon phase” of their marriage.

Step 2: Narrow Down Your List

Once you have a list of several options, decide on two couples who have been married for more than six months and fewer than five years. You will interview only one couple, but it’s good to have a backup. However, you may want to interview both couples to get a second perspective. Next, decide on two couples who have been married for at least 6-19 years. Finally, decide on two couples who have been happily married for 20+ years. Remember, these are three separate dates, not one with all three sets of couples at the same time.

Step 3: Contact the Couples

Now reach out to one of the couples (it doesn’t matter which order) and tell them that you have admired their relationship and would like to go out to spend some time with them and learn from their experience and get some advice on how to have a great marriage. They will be very flattered, and most likely very willing to oblige.

I suggest that once you have a day nailed down that works for both of you, send them the questions a day or so before your time together. You want them to be prepared, but you don’t want them to be thinking about it for weeks and have them come with books, articles, and pages

of notes. In addition, tell them that they don't have to answer any question they don't feel comfortable with that they believe is too personal. Again, I would stress, be sure that this is a couple that you believe has a really good marriage; they are solid and are very committed to each other. Here's a script you could say or send to them:

Hi, _____, Hey, as you know, we are getting married in a few months, and my fiancé and I are taking an online premarital course to get us as prepared as we can be. Part of the course asks us to interview several couples whom we admire and whom we see as having a great marriage — So we thought of you two! We have been given a set of questions to ask you on a variety of topics. We would love to have you over for dinner or go out to eat and talk about these questions. Please let us know if this is something that you could help us out with. Thank you!

Step 4: Go Out with the Couple and Do the Interviews

I know you are very busy getting ready for the wedding, but this activity doesn't have to take long, and everyone has to eat, so you might as well be together and learn a few things. It would be best if both of you bring a note pad and pen to take notes because, just like school, you are likely to forget what they said. Finally, I would suggest that you write a Thank You note to them and give them a small, inexpensive gift. Your gift might be making dinner for them during your time together or paying for their meal if you go out to dinner.

Be aware that you might find that not all of their advice is helpful or not all of it will apply to your situation. Much like this course, filter through the parts that fit, and don't worry about the rest. But before you disregard any information, ask yourself, *"Am I dismissing this potentially great information or advice because it seems too hard, or does this information just not fit with our situation?"*

The Great Marriage Interview Questions

Newlywed Couple

- How did you meet?
- What were some things about your partner that were most attractive?
- Was there anything during your engagement that really helped you prepare for marriage?
- What advice do you have for us about getting ready for the wedding and for the wedding day?
- If you could go back in time to when you were engaged and first married, what would you tell yourself?

- What do you wish your spouse knew about you before you were married?
- After you got married, was there anything that was unexpected that took some time to adjust to?
- What advice would you give us at this stage to prepare for our first year of marriage?
- What advice would you give us on the following topics:
 - Finances
 - In-laws
 - Holidays
 - Communication
 - Time spent together
 - Keeping your love alive
 - Sexual Intimacy
- What has been the best part of being married?
- What has been the most difficult part?
- Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to know?

Couple Married 5-20 Years

- How did you meet?
- What were some things about your partner that were most attractive?
- Was there anything during your engagement that really helped you prepare for marriage?
- What has been the best part of being married?
- What has been the most difficult part?
- If you could go back in time to when you were engaged and a newlywed, what would you tell yourself?
- If you could go back in time to when you were engaged and a newlywed, what would you wish your spouse knew?
- How is your marriage different now from when you were newlyweds?
- What advice would you give us at this stage to prepare for our first year of marriage?
- What advice would you give us on the following topics:
 - Finances
 - In-laws
 - Holidays
 - Communication
 - Sexual Intimacy
 - Time spent together
 - Keeping your love alive
 - The transition to becoming parents

- Raising children
- Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to know?

Couple Married 20+ Years

- How did you meet?
- What were some things about your partner that were most attractive?
- What has been the best part of being married?
- What has been the most difficult part?

- If you could go back in time to when you were engaged, first married, or at any point of your relationship, what would you tell yourself?
- How is your marriage different now from when you were newlyweds or married for 10-15 years?
- What advice would you give us at this stage to prepare for our first year of marriage?
- What advice would you give us on the following topics:
 - Finances
 - In-laws
 - Holidays
 - Communication
 - Sexual Intimacy
 - Raising children
- Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to know?

Step 5: Discuss what you Learned as a Couple

Now that you've had the opportunity to be with and learn from this great couple, within at least 48 hours after your time with them, dedicate some time to discuss with each other what you learned. Ask each other the following questions:

- Which pieces of advice were the most helpful for you?
- Which pieces of advice do think we need to really implement as a couple?

Step 6: Create a Notebook with the Best Advice

If you have time before the wedding, together, spend time creating a document (or at least keep the notes available) with the best pieces of advice, something for you to look back on throughout your marriage. This would be a fun activity to go through on your anniversaries and to see how you are doing. If you don't have time before your wedding to create the book or document, be sure to do it before you've been married three months.

Copyright © 2019 by Jeremy S. Boden, PhD, LMFT

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the author, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at jeremysboden@gmail.com.