

Dating for Dummies

One of the study aids that I see my children using in preparation for their final exams is Cliffs Notes. As long as they do not use these little booklets as a substitute for reading the primary material, I don't object and can even see the value in having a concisely focused summary of the key points. Another study aid that my daughter showed me is the "...for Dummies" series—an overview of a complex topic broken down into bullet points that are accessible to the average student.

If you will imagine your decision to make a lifelong commitment to that special someone as your final exam—the ultimate test as far as relationships go—then I would like to offer you an essential study guide. I hesitate to call it "Dating for Dummies" because there's nothing dumb about wanting to know another person as thoroughly as possible before entrusting all dimensions of your life to them.

And whether you've been studying all along for this major evaluation of your I.Q. (intimacy quotient) or whether you've failed a few pop quizzes and find yourself cramming for the final, I have some study tips that will ensure your success. Specifically, here are 20 questions that you must ask yourself and your special someone.

Regarding answers to them, there is no one "right" way to answer, but I've offered some things to think about as you weigh the many possible answers.

1. What do you expect?

Perhaps no other question is so critical to the success of your relationship. While expectations reveal themselves over time, it should also be the focus of direct, candid conversation between you and your beloved. Adjusting expectations will help alleviate disappointments. Too many times our expectations are based on our past experiences, what we do or do not want to see duplicated in our relationship from our parents or others who influenced us.

There is a vast difference between who we are versus how we present ourselves. I often refer to this tension as the friction between our ideal self and our real self. Unfortunately, we do not marry the

Asking Questions & Revealing Secrets

Sometimes we avoid asking certain questions of our beloved because we are afraid to hear the answers. Once we hear the truth out loud, it may confirm our worst fears, and then it's harder to move forward together pretending we don't know the truth.

It's not always easy to ask about a person's sexual history or whether or not they have a criminal past, but certainly these are critical concerns. Sure the answers could be embarrassing for you and your partner, but it will be more uncomfortable later if you are keeping secrets that are suddenly revealed in an unpleasant or public way, or if you have to hear the information about your loved one from someone else.

If there are significant issues in your past that you know your partner should know, it's better to reveal them upfront than to have them found out later. If you reveal something difficult and your partner walks away, consider yourself lucky to know how they feel upfront.

ideal but the reality. Yet the ideal projections of both you and your partner can create expectations that counter the reality of your relationship once the masks are off. There is nothing more debilitating than over promising and under delivering.

The number one killer of relationships is not communication or even finances—it's expectations. Only when we expect our relationships to go a certain way and they veer from our trajectory do we end up offended by the other person. So many people's expectations throughout Scripture almost prevented them from receiving God's blessing. In 2 Kings 5, we see Naaman, an army captain, suffering from leprosy. He's sent to Israel to seek a cure from a man of God, Elisha, living there. When Naaman arrives at Elisha's home, the prophet sends a messenger to tell the soldier to go wash seven times in the river. Naaman responds by saying, "Well, I thought he would at least come to the door and pray over me and heal me." He EXPECTED Elisha to greet him at the door. He EXPECTED Elisha to lay hands on him. It takes Naaman's servant to point out that Elisha told him how to be cured, which the leper finally does and is healed. But his expectations almost killed his deliverance!

When you weigh the answer: It may be wise to minimize your own expectations or at least adjust them to a realistic framework: to expect nothing more than you're willing to give. Someone has said that expectations are nothing more than future resentments. Avoid those resentments by allowing the other person to give freely. You rob the individual of blessing you from their heart when you have unhealthy expectations.

It may require several conversations, but be blunt and ask the other person what they expect from a relationship with you. And tell them, in kind, what you expect. Open up the front door of communication in the house of love you hope to build together.