

4 Topics You Should Always Bring Up in a New Relationship

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Know what you're signing up for.

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The early stages of a relationship are usually pretty blissful. You're getting to know each other, finding out your likes and dislikes, and even falling starry-eyed in love. But while you're in this dreamy phase, it pays to inquire about some potentially uncomfortable topics, relationship experts say.

"Asking questions is how you establish trust, safety, and emotional security," says Marissa Nelson, relationship therapist and founder of Intimacy Moons Retreats. "I can't tell you how many times I've worked with couples who point to the beginning of their relationship as a time when one partner wasn't forthright about something or didn't tell the truth."

What you ask is important—and so is *how* you broach these subjects. Instead of interrogating or issuing ultimatums, "come from a place of curiosity, and use questions as a way to learn, share, and grow together," says Nelson. The answers your new partner offers can clue you in to whether you're compatible in a long-term way. Here's what you need to discuss, plus the right approach to get answers.

How they feel about past relationships

No, you're not bringing this up to snoop into your new partner's old love life. You want to hear how they describe their former flames and how things ended. This can let you know that those past love interests really are in the past. And you'll hopefully get their take on what these relationships taught him, as well as if he blames them or holds grudges.

"Instead of asking why their last relationship ended, ask what they learned from it and if it changed their view of what it means to be in a committed relationship," says Nelson. Getting a sense of how the relationship affected their view of love is much more useful than getting dirt on an ex. Make sure you use a neutral tone that conveys you're interested because you want to get to know them, not vet or judge.

If they've been tested for STIs

Even if you've already jumped into bed together, ask your new partner about their sexual health history. "Discuss STIs and ask about the last time they were tested, their status, and if they've been sexual with anyone else since then," says Rachel Needle, PsyD, a

psychologist at the Center for Marital and Sexual Health of South Florida.

If they say they've never been tested, you can say it's important to you to head to an MD, and you'll go with them if that makes it easier. If they strongly resist, they may have something to hide.

How they spend their downtime

"The beginning of a relationship is when you want to spend time getting to know your partner," says Needle. You already know you have chemistry, but you're trying to measure how you get along in a long-term way. "Ask about their favorite music or movies, what an ideal Saturday looks like for them, and where they enjoyed traveling to the most," adds Needle.

These aren't hard-hitting topics, but they can give you a better sense of who he or she is, what they value most, and what your future together might look like.

What they think of marriage

Okay, so you're not going to ask a new partner if they plan to propose to you. But it's smart to get a sense of what they think of marriage and commitment early on. Don't start planning your big day together, but don't tiptoe around it either. Asking questions that tackle the topic indirectly can give you an idea of where they stand, and if you're potentially on the same page.

"Instead of saying, 'If you're not interested in marriage then I don't think this is going to work,' ask them to tell you about the marriages in their family," suggests Nelson. Find out if their parents or grandparents are divorced. If not, inquire about how long they've been together.

"These types of questions aren't asking whether he or she wants to get married in a year; they're revealing how your partner feels about marriage and the backdrop of their relationship life," she says. Of course, a person can change their mind in time, but if you're a big fan of marriage and your new love insists that it's a relic of another era, it's good to know.