

## Talking It Over

1. On a scale of 0–10, how strongly do you feel the “tingles” for the person you are dating?
2. If the average “life span” of the tingles is two years, how much longer can you expect to have the euphoric feelings?
3. To what degree have you explored the more important issues of compatibility in the following areas?
  - intellectual dialogue
  - emotional control
  - social interests
  - spiritual unity
  - common values
4. If you would like to explore these areas more fully, you may wish to use the questions found in the appendix, “Developing A Healthy Dating Relationship” on pages 149–161.

## Talking It Over

- 1.** Share with each other how your families typically celebrate Christmas and other significant holidays. Look for potential areas of conflict.
- 2.** What are the strongly held traditions in each of your families? These traditions may not focus on birthdays or holidays, but they are extremely important to your family members.
- 3.** Seek to discover the expectations that your in-laws may have of each of you after marriage. If you have siblings or friends who are married, you might discuss with them the kind of expectations they have encountered from parents and in-laws.
- 4.** Like the rest of us, all in-laws have certain patterns of behavior they follow. Some of these are positive, such as playing golf on Saturdays. Others are negative, such as getting drunk on Thursday nights. What patterns do you observe in each of your parents? Share these with each other and talk about those things that you might find irritating.

5. What are the strongly held religious beliefs of your parents? Share these with each other and talk about areas in which you might feel uncomfortable.
6. When your parents are discussing ideas with which you disagree, how well have you learned to withhold judgment and listen empathetically so that you can make an intelligent response? Share with each other illustrations of times in which you have listened well or not so well.
7. In your normal conversations, how well have you learned to speak for yourself? When the two of you have a disagreement, how often do you start your sentences with the word *you* as opposed to *I*? Discuss this with each other and focus on learning to speak for yourself.
8. When two people disagree, it calls for negotiation. The process requires someone to make a proposal, listen to a counterproposal, and seek to find a solution that everyone can agree on. How well have you done this in the past? Share your memories with each other.
9. Negotiation is enhanced when you make *requests* rather than *demands*. Think of times in which your requests have sounded like demands to the other person. Ask each other how you might reframe your desire so that it sounds like a request.
10. Do you know the primary love language of each of your parents? Do you know the love language of your in-laws? If so, how well are you speaking their love language? If not, what will you do to make this discovery?
11. If the person you are thinking of marrying already has children, I highly recommend that you read and discuss the book

*The Smart Step-Family*<sup>2</sup> by Ron Deal. The number one conflict in marriages that involve children is the conflict between child and stepparent.

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- 1.** What are the basic religious beliefs of your parents?
- 2.** Where are you in your own spiritual journey? Have you accepted, rejected, or modified the religious beliefs that you were taught as a child?
- 3.** What are your basic beliefs about God?
- 4.** What religious organizations are you affiliated with? How active is your involvement?
- 5.** How do your religious beliefs affect your daily lifestyle?
- 6.** If you are considering marriage, discuss your answers with your dating partner.
- 7.** Do you think you hold enough in common to build spiritual intimacy in your marriage?

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- 1.** On a scale of 1–10, rate yourself on the following personality traits. 10 means extremely high and 1 means extremely low.
  - a. Optimistic
  - b. Pessimistic
  - c. Neat
  - d. Messy
  - e. Babbling Brook
  - f. Dead Sea
  - g. Pointer
  - h. Painter
  - i. Aggressive
  - j. Passive
  - k. Logical
  - l. Intuitive
  - m. Organizer
  - n. Spontaneous
- 2.** Encourage your dating partner to do the above exercise and then discuss your answers with each other, giving illustrations as to why you rated yourself a particular score.
- 3.** If you are seriously considering marriage, perhaps you would like to take one or both of the free personality profiles discussed in this chapter. They can be found at the following websites: [oneishy.com/personality](http://oneishy.com/personality) and [couplecheckup.com](http://couplecheckup.com).
- 4.** If you receive premarital counseling from a counselor or religious leader, you may ask them about the possibility of taking the PREPARE/ENRICH assessment.

## Learning Exercises

**1.** Since getting to know each other is one of the primary purposes of a serious dating relationship, use the following questions to stimulate conversation.

- *What personal accomplishments have we shared with each other?*
- *What personal failures have we shared and what remains to be shared?*
- *To what degree have we shared our sexual history with each other?*
- *What do we know about each other's financial history?*

**2.** Since your extended family has influenced each of you greatly, use the following questions to help develop understanding of these relationships.

- *How would you describe the marital relationship of your mom and dad?*
- *From your perspective, what was your parents' main philosophy on child rearing? How do you agree or disagree with their approach to parenting?*
- *What kind of relationship do you presently have with your father?*
- *What is the nature of your relationship with your mother?*
- *If and when you get married, in what way would you like for your marriage to be different from that of your parents?*

**3.** Since educational and vocational accomplishments are a big part of life, use the following questions to explore this aspect of life.

- *What are your educational goals for the next five years?*

- *From what you know about your interests, what vocational goals do you presently have?*
- *Has your dating relationship been an asset or a liability to reaching these goals? In what way?*
- *To what degree do you feel your dating partner accepts and appreciates your goals?*

**4.** Since a healthy dating relationship is a balanced relationship, use the following questions to identify areas that may need further development.

**A. Intellectual**

- 1) *Have you taken time to compare your college or high school grades?*
- 2) *Have you ever read a magazine or online article and discussed your perceptions of the validity of the article?*
- 3) *What television programs do you typically watch? How often do you discuss your reactions to the programs that you view?*
- 4) *When you share your opinion on political issues, how does your dating partner typically respond?*
- 5) *When you have disagreements, to what degree do you feel free to share your perspective? How do you typically respond when your partner shares his/her perspective?*
- 6) *Have you learned to disagree without being disagreeable?*

**B. Emotional**

- 1) *What emotions have you felt throughout this day? What stimulated those emotions?*
- 2) *How often, and to what degree, do you share your emotions with each other?*



- 3) *When you do share emotions, how does the other person typically respond? What improvements would you like to see in this part of your relationship?*

### **C. Social**

- 1) *What social events have the two of you attended together in the last month? Share with each other your level of enjoyment or frustration with these events.*
- 2) *What sports event do you most enjoy attending or watching on television?*
- 3) *Do either of you have interest in attending musical events? Have you discussed how this interest affects your relationship?*
- 4) *How many movies have you watched together in the past six weeks? Did you discuss the content of these movies afterwards?*
- 5) *When you attend social events that involve talking with other people, what bothers you most about your partner's behavior?*
- 6) *What improvements would you like to see in this part of your relationship?*

### **D. Spiritual**

- 1) *Have the two of you discussed your spiritual backgrounds?*
- 2) *If you grew up in a religious home, have you embraced the faith of your childhood? Or have you rejected it? Or are you still trying to decide? What is your view of God?*
- 3) *If you have children, will you raise them in a particular faith?*
- 4) *What changes would you like to see in this part of your relationship?*

### **E. Physical**

- 1) *What kind of affirming touches communicate love to you?*
- 2) *Have you discussed with each other what you think are inappropriate touches?*
- 3) *To what degree have you felt pressured to accept touches that you feel are inappropriate?*
- 4) *What changes would you like to see in this aspect of your relationship?*

## Talking It Over

1. What do you think is your primary love language? Why?
2. If you are dating, what do you think is the primary love language of your partner?
3. Perhaps you would like to take the love languages quiz found at [5lovelanguages.com](http://5lovelanguages.com).
4. Discuss how you think this information will enhance your relationship.
5. If you have not read *The Five Love Languages Singles Edition*, you may wish to read it together and discuss its implications in all of your relationships.

## Talking It Over

### **FOR THE MAN:**

1. Make a list of the things you like about your father. Then make a list of the things you consider to be negative traits in your father. If the girl you are dating has spent considerable time with your father, ask her to make similar lists about observations she has made about your father.
2. Use these lists as a basis for discussing the ways in which you would like to be different from your father.
3. What specific steps will you take to begin to make these changes?

### **FOR THE WOMAN:**

1. Make a list of the things you like about your mother. Then make a list of the things you consider to be negative traits in your mother. If the man you are dating has spent considerable time with your mother, ask him to make similar lists about observations he has made about your mother.
2. Use these lists as a basis for discussing the ways in which you would like to be different from your mother.
3. What specific steps will you take to begin to make these changes?

## Talking It Over

1. Have you encountered any conflicts in your relationship in the past few months?
2. How did you resolve them?
3. At this point in your relationship, do you have any unresolved conflicts?
4. Memorize this question and use it the next time you have a conflict: “How can we resolve this conflict so that both of us feel loved and appreciated?”
5. In this chapter, we discussed three positive ways to resolve conflicts:
  - “Meeting in the middle”
  - “Meeting on your side”
  - “Meeting later”

Did you use any of these strategies in resolving a recent conflict? Did each of you feel loved and appreciated?

6. Can you think of an illustration where “meeting later” or “agreeing to disagree” might become a solution to one of your conflicts?
7. In your opinion, how well are the two of you doing in reaching win-win solutions when you have disagreements? What do you need to change or continue in order to improve?

## Talking It Over

- 1.** Do you remember the last time you apologized? If so, what did you say?
- 2.** Do you remember the last time someone apologized to you? Did it seem sincere? Did you forgive the person? Why or why not?
- 3.** Discuss with each other what you expect to hear in a sincere apology.
- 4.** Presently, is there anything for which you need to apologize? Why not do it today?

## Talking It Over

- 1.** Is there someone you need to lovingly confront? What keeps you from doing so?
- 2.** Is there someone you have not yet forgiven? What keeps you from doing so?
- 3.** What barriers stand between you and someone you love? What will you do to remove the barriers?
- 4.** When someone apologizes to you, how easy is it for you to forgive? Why?

## Talking It Over

- 1.** If you grew up with your father, what responsibilities did he accept in the family?
- 2.** What responsibilities did your mother accept?
- 3.** If you are seriously considering marriage, complete the assignment described above.



## Talking It Over

- 1.** What is your present financial plan? (How do you use your money?) Be as detailed as possible. If you are contemplating marriage, ask your dating partner to do the same.
- 2.** Do you give away 10 percent of your income?
- 3.** Do you place at least 10 percent of your income into some savings or investment plan?
- 4.** Discuss items 2 and 3 with your prospective mate and agree on what you will do after you are married.
- 5.** Begin doing individually whatever you plan to do after you are married. That is, if you agree to put 10 percent of your income into savings after marriage, begin to do so while you are single. (What you do now is a good indicator of how well you will follow the plan after marriage.)
- 6.** If engaged, declare your total assets and liabilities to your fiancé. Take a realistic look at your debts and resources.
- 7.** Together work out a payment schedule for any debts you will have when you are married.
- 8.** Together work out a financial plan for spending your money after you are married. This will require information regarding housing and utility costs.
- 9.** Discuss and seek agreement that neither of you will ever make a major purchase without consulting the other. No agreement—no purchase! (Agree on the dollar value of a “major purchase.”)
- 10.** Who will keep the books? Why?

## Talking It Over

1. How would you describe the current cultural perspective on sex?
2. In what ways do you agree or disagree with this perspective?
3. Research indicates that couples who have sexual intercourse before marriage have a higher divorce rate than those who do not. Why do you think this would be true?
4. To what degree have you shared your sexual history with the person you are dating?
5. If you are seriously contemplating marriage, you may want to read *The Gift of Sex* by Clifford and Joyce Penner.<sup>4</sup>