



Marriage Matters

Are We Compatible?

How do you know if a person is compatible as a life-long partner? What does it take to *really* get to know someone? According to Dr. John Van Epp, author of the program *P.I.C.K. a Partner (Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge)* (www.lovethinks.com) and the book *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk*, it takes three things: Time, Talk, and Togetherness. Each of these three “Ts” is equally important to learning more about a potential partner.

For example, when on a date at a movie, the couple is together but really not talking. When a couple first starts dating, they may spend lots of time on the phone or sending email messages to each other, but they are not physically together to observe each other’s behaviors. According to Dr. Van Epp, togetherness is where you see the person in action in many different situations—having fun, being serious, alone with you, and interacting with others. Hence, it also takes time to truly get to know a person.

But what does it mean to really know someone? According to Dr. Van Epp, there are five key things you want to learn about a potential partner (and yourself) as you spend time talking and doing things together. He refers to these as getting to know “F.A.C.E.S.”

F - Family dynamics and background: Family experiences strongly influence our attitudes and behaviors (e.g., communication patterns, dealing with conflict) in future relationships. Gender role expectations (who’s expected to do what), communication patterns, lessons about relationships, and dealing with conflict or stress are all shaped by our family experience. How well do you know your partner’s family? How do they treat each other? Are there patterns you notice that are troublesome? How similar or dissimilar are your families?

A - Attitudes and actions of a mature conscience: How mature is your partner? What is this person’s sense of right and wrong? Does this person make wise and kind choices or just think about his/her own needs? Does this person show they have a sense of how his/her words and actions affect others? At the start of the relationship your partner may present his/her best side, but it is what you observe over time that will truly reflect his or her maturity.

C- Compatibility potential: What are your partner’s interests, personality, skills, values, goals, beliefs, and attitudes about life? How much do you have in common? Do you enjoy spending time together? While looks do matter, it’s these aspects of compatibility that develop friendship and serve as the foundation for a long-lasting relationship.

E- Examples of previous friendship or relationship patterns: How we act in the past says a lot about how we will act in the future. How does your partner treat his/her friends and family members? More than likely the patterns of behavior you witness in these relationships will (eventually) show up in your relationship.

S- Skills for relationships: How well can you and your partner communicate with each other? Is your partner a good listener? Is s/he open and honest? Can you talk out problems? The research is clear—good communication and positive ways of handling conflict results in healthy, long-lasting relationships.

There will always be things to learn and discover about each other, but before making a lifetime commitment, it is important to know as much about your partner, as well as yourself, as possible. Learn about where s/he comes from, who s/he is, and who s/he wants to be by spending lots of time talking with each other and observing his or her behavior and interactions with others.

ACTIVITY



Learn about each other through photos. Sit down together with your perspective partner and share pictures you each have of family, friends, and past events. Share the stories behind the photos with each other to learn more about your past experiences and relationships. Make a special keep-sake album with the photos and record special notes about each picture.



This resource supports the following principles of healthy relationships:



For more resources, visit www.gafamilies.org and www.nermen.org.

