

# BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



## Making Marriage Happy: Hard-Won Wisdom from Real Couples

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1. In the book's introduction, the author introduces the vague, conventional wisdom that persists about what it takes to make a marriage work.
  - What do you think some of these phrases mean, like "It takes a lot of work," "Communication is the key," and "You have to put your spouse first"?
  - How true are they for you in your own relationship, and why do you think these phrases persist as nuggets of truth?
2. In Chapter 1, "Two Becoming One," under the subhead "Some couples reject the idea of compromise," one of the interviewees says this:

"There's a myth that's very strong, and that's that a relationship means compromise. I don't believe that's true. I'm not compromising anything, and my husband's not compromising anything. I respect what he wants to do, and he respects what I want to do. When we have conflicts, we have no problems making adjustments, but I don't sacrifice anything for this relationship."

  - How do you relate to this statement?
3. Chapter 2 is all about conflict and what the couples have learned about disagreements over time.
  - What strategies have you learned about how, when, and where to argue with your partner or spouse?
  - What advice would you give a newly engaged couple about the role conflict plays in a long-term relationship?
4. Chapter 3 is titled "Roommate Issues" and covers housekeeping, manners, chores, and what it's like to live with another person.
  - How do you manage "roommate issues" in your relationship, and do they spark conflict?
  - How important are manners, courtesy, and kindness in the way you relate to your partner?
5. In Chapter 4, the couples talk about the role money plays in their lives.
  - What conflicts have you and your spouse had about money, and have you seen any themes emerge in your disagreements?
  - What differences do you and your partner have about money that come from the ways you were raised?

6. Chapter 5 is titled “Public and Private.” Here the couples discuss the role confidentiality plays in their relationships, meaning what they share with others, what they don’t, and how they behave in public.

- How much do you talk to people outside your marriage about your relationship, and why?
- Do you think it’s necessary to keep anything in your marriage confidential?

7. The next chapter is titled “Can You Change Your Partner?” and discusses the paradox of falling in love with someone—and then wanting them to change things about themselves.

- How possible is it for humans to love each other unconditionally?
- What have you tried to change about romantic partners you’ve had—and how well did that work?

8. Time and talk emerge as the big ingredients of happy marriage, discussed in Chapter 7.

- How much do you agree with the author’s assertion that time and talk build compatibility and help keep marriages happy?
- A section in this chapter is titled “Truth or dare? Telling the truth about yourself is essential.” What role does being yourself have in your relationship? Do you feel free to speak the truth all the time with your spouse, or are there trouble spots you avoid—and if so, why?

9. Chapter 8 is all about romance, which may have little or nothing to do with sex.

- What does romance look like in your relationship, and is it the same as it was when you and your partner were dating?
- How do you rekindle romance when you feel you’ve lost some of the excitement?

10. Chapter 9 is about giving gifts and how some people struggle, even after many years, to give good gifts that their spouses will appreciate.

- How important are gifts in your relationship, and what’s are the best and worst gifts you’ve received from your partner?
- Did the examples in the book inspire you to give a special gift to your spouse in the future?

11. Chapter 10 is titled “For Worse,” and here we learn some of the struggles the couples have been through in their marriages. Some went to counseling and were helped by professional therapists.

- How have tough times impacted your marriage or relationship?
- Would you ever see a therapist individually, or would you go with your partner as a couple? Why or why not?

12. The next chapter is all about the power two people have in a good marriage to strengthen each other as individuals.

- What have you been able to do with the support of your spouse that you wouldn’t have achieved otherwise?
- Do you have any goals for the future that your spouse could help you achieve? If so, have you acted on them—and if not, why not?

13. The final chapter of the book discusses what the term “commitment” means and how the couples are confident that their marriages will last.

- What does commitment mean to you? How do you define it?
- This chapter also notes that the happy couples interviewed were demonstrably “in like” with each other. The author observed that these spouses look each other in the eye, make each other laugh, and seem to be “in like.” How important is it for spouses to like each other, and is having fun a noteworthy ingredient in a happy marriage?