

# From Wedding to Marriage



Marcia E. Brubeck, JD,  
MSW, LCSW  
674 Prospect Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105

860-231-1997  
MarciaBrubeck.com

You and your partner have decided to make your commitment formal and public. The appointed day is hurtling toward you. You have designed the ceremony in areas ranging from menus and music to videos and vows. Your guests have reserved the date. Soon it will soon be time for lights, camera, action—and then what?

A commitment ceremony, or wedding, is both a rite of passage and a dramatic landmark. When separate individuals join forces, a dream is born. The fairy tales tell us that the prince and princess live happily ever after, but details are lacking. Is there some special magic no one talks about? If you could prepare for your life together as carefully as you did for the wedding day, what might you do?

## Know Yourself

Don't let partnership make you lose sight of your personal requirements—the things you need whether you are single or with someone. Your most important resource in building your marriage will be your knowledge not of your spouse but of yourself. Don't lose sight of what you need to stay healthy and productive as an adult. Know yourself!

All of us need a good diet and enough sleep and exercise, but each of us has important quirks. Maybe you meditate regularly, crave frequent phone contact with extended family, or take a long, hot bath undisturbed at the end of the day. You may want a hug at certain times, ask that no one, but no one, telephone you after 10:00 pm, or regard your sock drawer as off limits to everyone, including your spouse.

The habits and preferences that are indispensable for your general well-being are your gotta haves. Insisting on these is one way in which you, as an adult, parent

yourself. You must be able to take care of yourself no matter if you are going to participate fully in a committed romantic relationship.

### Promote Open Communication

Good partnerships bring together individuals who are self-sufficient and who value the rewards of camaraderie more than the liberties lost when each ceases to be a lone ranger.

Over time, you and your spouse will develop a routine that allocates responsibilities on the basis of your individual talents and inclinations. In the meantime, tell each other what you expect from daily life. Communicate openly and clearly.

Discuss mundane matters—not just whether you want the condo or the colonial but how you feel about jalapeños, hip-hop, dust mites, dirty dishes, video games, values, and sleeping late on Sunday. What do you want from each other? Don't just focus on the negative. Tell each other what feels good.

### Accept Differences

Agree up front that each of you is the expert on your own feelings and will issue regular news bulletins about them. (None of us is a mind reader.) At the first sign of distress, someone must say, "Wait, there's a problem. We need to sit down and talk about this."

At moments of conflict, you will have to check back with your innermost self, to revisit your gotta-haves so that you know what is less important and therefore negotiable. You need to be able to hear the other person's feelings while staying connected with your own.

### Learn from Conflict

Let's say your dearly beloved, wearing the wedding band, made a down payment on a Rolls-Royce without consulting you. You are burned. "We need to talk about this," you say furiously. You may conceivably add, "but we can't do it right now, because I am [or: you are, or: we are] too upset." (The dialogue will not be productive unless both of you are calm.)

"What were you thinking?" you eventually ask. Your partner begins speaking. In this first stage, you listen silently.

When your partner has finished, you reflect what you heard: "So you are saying that a new luxury car will increase your business prospects? Did I get that right?"

Your partner says, “Yes, that’s it,” or perhaps, “Well, that’s part of it, but I also felt like a bum, driving that beat-up old jalopy.”

Again you listen and reflect back what you have heard. In time your partner will tell you that you have gotten the whole message.

Now it’s your turn. You say, “I can’t believe that you would spend so much money without talking it over with me first. I am terribly hurt!”—and so forth. Your partner must listen, as you did, without interrupting until you have finished and must show you that your words have been understood.

Each of you then retires to the drawing board to find an answer that meets your own needs (don’t worry about the other person’s). You compare notes and negotiate so as to accommodate each other’s gotta haves.

The final solution should be one that the two of you regard as likely to prevent any recurrence of this particular problem. Thereafter one last step remains. Someone must ask, “Are we finished with this?”

If the answer is yes, the incident can be laid to rest permanently. But if one of you says, “Yes, but I’m still angry that you . . .,” then you must repeat the process, step by step, until all problems have been ironed out.

The tricks for conflict resolution are to deal with friction right away, without letting grievances fester, and to know yourself. Negotiate in good faith. Unless both parties feel heard and both are comfortable with the agreed-upon solution, the issue will return.

### Remember You Are Three

Each of you has learned to speak openly and feels accepted by the other. You are prepared to navigate the shoals of conflict. You happily anticipate the joys of building and sharing a home and a family. Don’t forget in the early days of your union, though, that you are now not two but three: you, your partner, and your relationship. Build your relationship skills.

As the shiny newness wears off, remember that a young marriage, like any infant, requires nurturance if it is to thrive. Make time for fun and romance on a regular basis. Go out together at least once a week. Send each other flowers. Tuck silly, loving messages inside coat pockets. Celebrate your partner’s quirks. Be unpredictably whimsical as often as you can.

### Take the Long View

You and your spouse are traveling companions on life’s path. As you grow and change, major decisions affecting your relationship must be made bilaterally, not unilaterally. The responsibility that each of you has to yourself—the duty to

provide for your own needs—will always take priority over your allegiance to the marriage.

### Acknowledge Ambivalence

Whatever real life subsequently brings, the wedding will live in memory as both a reminder of your joint vision and a commitment publicly made. In anticipation of the big moment, brides and grooms generally feel some trepidation no matter how well they know each other and no matter how dedicated they are.

If you get nervous, don't panic. Listen while friends and relatives describe their walk to the altar. Ambivalence and anxiety are natural, normal parts of the transition from one life stage into the unknown territory of the next. Remember to be guided by your feelings and have faith in yourself.

Copyright © 2007 by Marcia E. Brubeck, 674 Prospect Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission.