

# Facilitating Marriage Education as Individuals and Couples

“Learning in action...” (Universal House of Justice, 1-13-03)

“The more we do, the more we learn.” (International Teaching Centre, 9-30-07)

## What Is Marriage Education?

Marriage education is a process of teaching important knowledge, skills, and attitudes about relationships and marriage. Marriage education is not counseling or therapy, but instead it focuses on building understanding and competence. In other words, its purpose is to build capacity and strengths and equip people to be successful in their roles as relationship partners and then as marriage partners. It begins with preparation for relationships and marriage for individuals and couples of all ages and experience levels. Marriage education provides marriage-strengthening tools for happily married couples. It can also provide skill building and assistance for deeply troubled couples considering separation or divorce, although this education is usually best paired with help from a trained counselor. Marriage education’s focus is on taking timely actions to prevent future problems.

## The Role of the Individual and Couples

Individual awareness and initiative are key factors in the effective establishment and maintenance of relationships and marriages in the Bahá’í community and the greater community. Individuals and couples can make the personal choice to seek out and participate in relationship and marriage education: knowledge and skill building for strong and happy marriages. As people establish strong marriages and families, this strengthens the community. Awareness also helps individuals and couples provide outreach and encouragement to others, helping them to understand how to establish strong marriages and assisting them with resources during difficult times. “The individual initiative of the friends should be carefully nurtured and encouraged so that they may, guided by the spiritual principles of our Faith, arise to fulfill their spiritual responsibilities.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 556)

### *Core Activities Connection*

At this stage in the development of the Bahá’í community, the Universal House of Justice has created a Five Year Plan and directed the Bahá’ís to focus on building human resources and then to create growth and development. The primary vehicle to accomplish these goals is through globally establishing four neighborhood-based core activities: devotional meetings, study circles, children’s classes, and junior youth groups led by youth. The planet has been subdivided into clusters to facilitate this spiritualization process. Neighborhood activities are organized and hosted by both Bahá’ís and people of a variety of faiths (with the Bahá’ís assisting and tracking progress).

While marriage education involves detailed subject matter that is not part of study circle courses or other core activities, there is **a synergistic relationship between marriage preparation and strengthening and the core activities**. By implementing the features of the Plan in our individual and collective endeavors, participants contribute to the strength of the Bahá’í Faith on every scale, including the fundamental units of the marriage and family. Regular and systematic study and implementation of features of the Five Year Plan and incorporation of learning shared by the local, regional, national, and international institutions, therefore, is implicitly in the best individual and collective interest of all units of society.

As people participate in the core activities, absorbing and applying the content and learning from the experiences, they strengthen their spiritual lives and improve their ability to apply spiritual principles in all aspects of their lives. Of course, this includes their relationships, marriages, and families. Of particular focus in many core activities is character, the development and knowing of which is an essential prerequisite to a successful marriage. Individual and family transformation can be one outcome of participation in the core activities of the Plan.

Couples who have strong and happy relationships and marriages are also more likely to participate fully and effectively in the life of the community, which of course significantly includes the core activities.

## Foundation Statements and Principles

- **Marriage is a foundational element for all human society**  
“The Bahá’í teachings...centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution.” (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 223)
- **Marital and family unity among the Bahá’ís builds credibility for their message to the world; seriously courting a partner and maintaining marriages are part of an individual’s and couple’s service to God**  
“...[I]f the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the pre-eminent character of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh? What possible influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace?” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222)
- **Marriage preparation is a key element in preserving marriage**  
“Careful preparation for marriage is an essential first step in the preservation of Bahá’í marriage.” (Universal House of Justice, Introduction to *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages* compilation, item 3)
- **The local Spiritual Assembly is available to assist individuals and couples with information, guidance, and consultation**  
“...[H]e feels that you should turn to your Local Assembly, in the strictest confidence, and seek their aid and advice. These bodies have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect, and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to—indeed they were established just for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers.  
“You should go to them as a child would to its parents....” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “The Local Spiritual Assembly”*, p. 48)
- **Maintain focus on the Plans of the Universal House of Justice, which includes placing a strong emphasis on the core activities and intensive programs of growth as the most vital priorities**  
“...[E]nsure that your endeavors are in harmony with and contribute to the activities of the Bahá’í community. What is essential, of course, is that nothing be done to distract the friends from pursuing tasks central to the Five Year Plan.” (Universal House of Justice to the Marriage Transformation Project, June 2, 2005)
- **Strong, happy marriages foster active participation of individuals and couples in core activities**  
“In every part of the world the three participants in the Plan—the individual, the community and the institutions—each playing a distinctive role, are reinforcing one another’s actions. The core activities of study circles, children’s classes and devotional meetings have become essential aspects and mutually enhancing achievements lending greater vigor and success to all the other elements of Bahá’í community life. Human resources are being augmented, and the Local Spiritual Assemblies are responding to the fresh demands of this rising vitality.” (The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 161, 2004)
- **Human resource development through the core activities can provide skills and knowledge that benefit relationships and marriage**  
“ [The individual is showing a]...growing sense of initiative and resourcefulness, as well as...courage and audacity.... Qualities such as consecration, zeal, confidence and tenacity attest to the enhanced vitality of their faith...” (The Universal House of Justice, December 27, 2005, para. 2.4) “...[A]bove all, it is reliance on God that sustains them in their endeavors.” (ibid, para. 2.5)
- **Building knowledge and skills with character/virtues supports relationships and marriages as well as all aspects of the core activities, each of which can include a focus on character**  
“Bahá’í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever.” (*Abdu’l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 118)  
  
“Bahá’í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage.” (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 368)

## Creating a Common Understanding About Character

For individuals, couples, and parents to effectively know one another's characters (and work on personal development of them), it is vital to have some common understanding of what character is, what character qualities are, and how to practice them. Simply put, **character is:**

- The sum of all the qualities you develop throughout your life as you make choices about how to speak and act
- The spiritual essence of who you are as a human being
- Your moral compass or ethical strength

One of the goals of the core activities is character transformation. Part of the goal of the Marriage Transformation Project, in consultation with various character experts, is to identify key character qualities that are vital to consider in relationships and marriages, define them, and clarify the behavior that is observable related to them. This empowers individuals and couples to practice the qualities in their lives and relationships/marriages.

One tool to assist this process is:

### Use Positive Character Quality Language!

**“The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun...” Bahá'u'lláh**

You can include a character quality to acknowledge others deeply, specifically, and sincerely. This practice encourages character growth, builds relationships, and brings happiness. Enjoy enhancing your communications with easy statements, such as:

- Thank you for being [helpful, flexible, truthful...].
- I appreciate your [courage, respect, faithfulness...].
- I love how [accepting, enthusiastic, encouraging...] you are!

### Character Qualities Vital for Relationships/Marriages

(**Note:** When you use these words, you are sharing the Word of God with others.  
All except for “assertiveness” appear in the scriptures of the world's religions.)

Acceptance	Encouragement	Joyfulness	Self-Discipline
Assertiveness	Enthusiasm	Justice	Service
Beauty	Equality	Kindness	Sincerity
Caring	Excellence	Love	Spirituality
Chastity	Faithfulness	Loyalty	Strength
Commitment	Flexibility	Mercy	Tactfulness
Compassion	Forgiveness	Moderation	Thankfulness
Confidence	Friendliness	Patience	Thoughtfulness
Contentment	Generosity	Peacefulness	Trustworthiness
Cooperation	Gentleness	Perseverance	Truthfulness
Courage	Helpfulness	Purity	Unity
Courtesy	Honesty	Purposefulness	Wisdom
Creativity	Humility	Resilience	
Detachment	Idealism	Respect	
Discernment	Integrity	Responsibility	

**Note:** A similar tool is “The Language of the Virtues”, as encouraged by The Virtues Project ([www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)). Special Ideas has “Ways to Praise” as well ([www.bahairesources.com/products.php?id=4572](http://www.bahairesources.com/products.php?id=4572))

The Marriage Transformation Project is now publishing books and materials that include in-depth content on each of these above character qualities. Here is an example:

## ✧ *Commitment* ✧

**Commitment is** making a reasonable promise or binding agreement, to oneself or to others, including setting and meeting certain goals or expectations and completing tasks to which one has agreed.

### **I practice Commitment effectively when I:**

- Keep my word and promises, following through by doing what I say I will do
- Accept and fulfill the responsibilities that accompany an agreement or decision
- Stay firm on an agreed course of action or work to improve a situation, even when it becomes difficult to do so
- Act according to my firm beliefs
- Move forward in a healthy relationship even when I feel some fear or anxiety based on previous experiences or the experiences of others

### **I need to strengthen Commitment when I:**

- Regard relationships as short-term conquests
- Repeatedly break promises
- Fail to fulfill my agreements or resolutions
- Fail to honor my word or my stated intentions
- Ignore the responsibilities necessary to fulfill an agreement

### **I misuse\* the strength of Commitment when I:**

- Behave in an inflexible, rigid, close-minded, or stubborn manner
- Refuse to renegotiate promises even when there is good reason to do so
- Keep commitments even when they clearly endanger health, safety, or relationships

**Reflection:** ...[C]ommitment means making hard choices among alternatives. Many people do not want to give up one option in order to have another, though they will have neither if they do not make a choice. But choices and priorities are intertwined with commitment.

~ Scott M. Stanley, *The Power of Commitment*, p. 55

\*A misuse occurs when someone practices a quality to excess or in the wrong time or place

### ***Core Activities Connection***

Character is perhaps one of the easiest topics connected to relationships and marriage that can easily be incorporated into the core activities. Devotional meetings can have character qualities such as respect, trustworthiness, moderation, friendliness, or compassion as themes. Children's classes will always incorporate character lessons. Study circle courses, especially Ruhi Book 1, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, also logically include character content, and junior youth groups incorporate character lessons.

In the sequence of Ruhi study circle courses, "Participants are exposed to a body of knowledge that fosters a set of related habits, attitudes, and qualities and are assisted in sharpening certain skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service." (Universal House of Justice, December 27, 2005)

## Components of Relationships/Marriage Preparation as Guided by the Bahá'í Teachings

Individuals and couples can create strong, happy marriages by conscientiously practicing the foundational pre-marriage components as outlined below. This is not an easy process, as most of the components have not historically been part of marriage in the ways that the Bahá'í teachings outline. New knowledge, skills, words, and actions are required to practice these and create a transformed culture of relationships and marriage.

### Friendship

“...[M]an and woman should truly be friends, and should be in sympathy with one another. Their understanding should have a basis in reality and not be based upon passion and desire....” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, p. 121)

### Courtship

“In the context of the society in which your family now lives, a society in which materialism, self-centeredness and failing marriages are all too common, your sons may well feel that it is wise to have a long period of courtship in which the prospective partners spend much time together and become thoroughly acquainted with each other’s character, background and family. ... [I]n a relationship in which such a decision [to marry] has not been taken and in which the law of chastity is strictly observed, there is no objection, in principle, to a prolonged friendship in which the two individuals entertain the possibility of marrying each other at some time in the future.” (Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994, to an individual, *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, p. 141)

### Know One Another’s Character

“Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 118)

### Practice Equality

“This principle [of the equality of the sexes] is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries.” (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual)

“Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.” (On behalf of The Universal House of Justice, 1992, “Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children”)

### Practice Chastity

“One speck of chastity is greater than a hundred thousand years of worship and a sea of knowledge.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in a letter November 26, 2003, from the Universal House of Justice)

“...[T]he Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore...” (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 344-345)

### Couple Decision to Marry

“Although a Bahá'í may, if he chooses, seek his parents’ advice on the choice of a partner, and although Bahá'í parents may give such advice if asked, it is clear from the Teachings that parents do not have the right to interfere in their children’s actual choice of a prospective partner until approached for their consent to marry.” (Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994, to an individual, *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, p. 141)

### Request for Parental Consent and Parental Consent Process

“...[M]arriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple’s wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them.” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 42)

“Bahá’í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage.”  
(Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 368)

### Engagement

“...Bahá’u’lláh ordained that Bahá’í engagement should not exceed 95 days, and, although this law has not yet been applied universally, it highlights the desirability of marrying quickly once the decision to marry has been firmly taken and parental consent obtained.” (Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994, to an individual, *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, p. 141)

### Bahá’í Wedding Vow

“When the consent of the parents is obtained, the only other requirement for the ceremony is the recitation by both parties in the presence of two witnesses of the specifically revealed verse: ‘We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.’ The following quotations from letters written ...[on behalf of Shoghi Effendi] indicate the desirability of the Bahá’í marriage ceremony being simple:

- a. “There is no ritual, according to the *Aqdas* [*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*], and ...[Shoghi Effendi] is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible....
- b. “The only compulsory part of a Bahá’í wedding is the pledge of marriage, the phrase to be spoken separately by the Bride and Bridegroom in turn, in the presence of Assembly witnesses.”

(On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 387-388)

### ***Core Activities Connection***

Involvement in the core activities as couples before marriage can provide a healthy, spiritual activity where they sincerely learn how to be of service to others through devotional meetings, children’s classes, study circles, and junior youth groups. Service is also an integral part of a happy marital life. Couple involvement in the core activities may provide a spiritual context that fosters friendship and courtship between them and offers a place to learn about one another’s character.

“[C]ourtship practices differ greatly from one culture to another, and it is not yet known what pattern of courtship will emerge in the future when society has been more influenced by Bahá’í Teachings. However, there is no indication that it will resemble the practices extant in existing cultures.... In this interim period, the friends are encouraged to make great efforts to live in conformity with the Teachings and to gradually forge a new pattern of behavior, more in keeping with the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.” (Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994)

In communities/clusters that are advanced enough to be involved in social and economic development and offering outreach services to others, providing relationship and marriage education can be a valuable contribution to the stability of couples, families, and neighborhoods.

### **Note About Available and Developing Resources**

The Marriage Transformation Project’s book *Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship* is set up for a general audience and includes some Bahá’í quotations. Its focus is on self-preparation for a relationship and establishing a relationship on a foundation of character and friendship. *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!* (Third edition was published in 2007) includes extensive Bahá’í Writings and details about self-preparation and then in-depth guidance for the entire courtship and marriage preparation/wedding process. It has quotations, stories, perspectives, cartoons, reflection and discussion questions, relationship coaching, activities, and worksheets. It is an excellent tool to assist long-distance relationships and is adaptable for focused study groups. There is a discount for group purchase of books. The project’s book *A Perfectly Funny Marriage: A Humorous View of Creating a Successful Marriage*, outlines the steps for success leading to a successful marriage and the steps to sustain it, each illustrated by a cartoon. *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage* is a marriage-strengthening book for married couples. New books focused on character are planned for 2008. See [www.marriagetransformation.com](http://www.marriagetransformation.com) for details.

## Possible Components of Pre-Marriage/Marriage Education

Be conscious of your own needs and the needs of those around you. Relationship/marriage education may provide some or all of the following vital knowledge and skills that support successful marriages:

- Communicating effectively
- Developing and utilizing consultation for decision-making
- Understanding expectations
- Resolving differences harmoniously
- Knowing one another's character
- Building a foundation of friendship
- Committing to marriage
- Honoring the consent process
- Expressing love effectively
- Establishing spiritual practices
- Creating marriage and family unity
- Being effective parents/stepparents
- Becoming equal partners, with both the man and the woman involved in and responsible for the quality of the relationship or marriage; no partner/child abuse or violence
- Meeting emotional needs
- Maintaining faithfulness
- Discussing sex and intimacy and establishing a healthy, unified intimate life in marriage
- Managing money issues
- Setting up and maintaining a household
- Managing time and service commitments
- Handling challenges and difficulties
- Practicing apology, amends, and forgiveness
- Having a positive attitude and using encouragement
- Including social and friendship time together and with others
- And many more...

### ***Core Activities Connection***

As the core activities develop, the participants gain knowledge and build skills. These are valuable for people in general, which means they are valuable within a marriage and family.

Marriage Education also increases an individual's knowledge and builds skills. These will also contribute to the effectiveness of the service that individuals offer to core activities and to programs of growth.

One of the integral pieces of core activities is the inclusion of arts-related components (examples: music, drama, crafts, dancing, drawing...). Some of these components are inspirational, others are designed to spark creativity, and others prompt learning. Marriage education activities are often most successful when they include arts-related components. Many of the components that are useful for core activities may develop out of marriage education initiatives, and the same is true in reverse. Activities that tutors develop to illustrate and help individuals learn key spiritual principles and practices can be useful in marriage education circumstances as well. (Note: The website [www.ruhiresources.org](http://www.ruhiresources.org) includes many activities useful for both venues as do the Marriage Transformation Project's books, particularly *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!* and *Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship*.)

### **Help At a Variety of Relationship/Marriage Stages**

Local Spiritual Assemblies regularly feel and express frustration because individuals and couples delay coming to them for guidance and assistance when they need knowledge and skill building or when they experience relationship or marriage challenges. The delay often creates unnecessary difficulties or hampers the ability of the Assembly to respond effectively. ***Seeing an Assembly when an issue is in its early stages provides the opportunity for the Assembly to be of service to you and often addresses a problem before it becomes destructively entrenched.***

In addition, when an individual or a couple approaches an Assembly, they often present final decisions rather than requesting guidance before decisions are made. For example, telling an Assembly that you are going to get married in a week rather than involving them early so that you are fully informed of any Bahá'í principles that apply to wedding planning, or telling the Assembly that you are divorcing instead of earlier asking for help with issues. Consultation achieves its best outcomes when all parties are open to new perspectives, information, and conclusions.

Times when it may be wise to approach an Assembly for information and guidance are:

- When you wish to date or court someone
- When you have decided to marry but not yet asked for parental consent/begun wedding planning
- When you have your parental consents and have chosen your wedding witnesses
- When you need to understand how to consult as a married couple
- When your marriage begins experiencing challenges
- When you want information about being a parent
- When you are discussing the possibility of separating
- When you need referral to a marriage counselor
- When you are seriously considering divorce
- Whenever you are unclear about Bahá'í principles or laws that apply to your life

Depending on the circumstances, the whole Assembly may meet with someone, a committee or representative may meet with the person instead, or the secretary may simply provide the person with helpful resources and referrals.

You may be in a situation where an Assembly assists you with finding a source for marriage education, or you may have to rely on individual initiative. Either way, increasing your relationship and marriage knowledge and skills is particularly helpful when there are stressful changes underway; such as at some key transition points:

- Pre-Marriage (Self-Preparation; Friendship; Dating; Courting; Getting to Know Character; Consent; Engagement)
- Newly married
- Becoming parents/stepparents
- Parenting young children
- Parenting adolescents
- Empty-nesting/Returning children
- Retiring/Elderly
- Job loss/change
- Moving homes
- Caring for one's parents
- Serious illness, disability, or death
- Any time there is a major test or difficulty

Each major change that couples experience brings a different set of stresses that can disrupt the balance between them and cause them to question their relationship. Couples can get help from relationship coaching and marriage education programs at any stage, regardless of how long the relationship has existed or its circumstances.

There are many secular and religiously-based relationship and marriage resources that are adaptable for people of any faith. If you are using these resources as individuals or couples, or facilitating them for others, materials should be carefully assessed for compatibility with Bahá'í spiritual principles, and these principles can then be incorporated into them (see following example: Love Languages). Other materials will derive directly from Bahá'í principles that are new in this religion (see following example: Equality). A general marriage education resource is [www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com).

### ***Core Activities Connection***

For Bahá'ís, pre-marriage/marriage education is a practical application component of the Bahá'í Writings. Education is vital as a way to keep relationships and marriages strong and individuals and couples fully participating in community life. Relationship and marriage challenges can distract individuals and couples and make it difficult to be involved, particularly in the core activities, which are very home-based.

Family Life is planned as future topic in the Ruhi sequence of study circle courses. However, the reality of family life is already an integral part of the core activities. Many activities take place in the homes of married couples, couples often tutor study circle courses together, children participate in children's classes and junior youth groups, and couples host devotional meetings. In addition, study circle tutors will naturally encourage participants to look at how to live their lives according to spiritual principles, which of course includes relationships and marriages. As participants assess how to bring a greater level of spiritual words, actions, and service into their lives and families, they will be prompted to develop their character qualities, spiritualize their words and actions, and increase their level of service of all kinds.

# Worksheet: Using The Love Languages

(Adapted Excerpt from *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, Third Edition, Chapter 21)

(Adapted from *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, Northfield Publishing, copyright © 1992, 1995, 2004; and *The Five Love Languages for Singles*, Northfield Publishing, copyright © 2004, by Gary Chapman. Used with permission.)

**“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ...Love never fails....”** (*The Bible*; 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5, 8)

**“...[W]ed Thou in the heaven of Thy mercy these two birds of the nest of Thy love, and make them the means of attracting perpetual grace; that from the union of these two seas of love a wave of tenderness may surge and cast the pearls of pure and goodly issue on the shore of life.”** (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), pp. 119-120)

**Purpose:** To identify the ways that you each prefer to receive love and to determine how to meet one another’s needs.

## Instructions:

- A) Read the description below of “The Five Love Languages” and how to identify them.
- B) Individually, complete the questions that follow to a) identify your primary love language and b) discern what you think your partner’s/spouse’s Love Language is.
- C) Share and discuss your answers with each other and determine one another’s Love Language preferences.
- D) Consult about how you can effectively express love to one another.

## Read the following:

Using loving words and doing loving actions help couples to feel love toward one another. Dr. Gary Chapman says in his book series on *The Five Love Languages* that there are five primary ways you receive love from your partner/spouse. Receiving them helps to keep your “love tank” full. If you are not receiving love in the way that is most important to you, then you may begin to question whether your spouse truly loves you. For instance, if you feel loved when someone gives you a gift, and your partner/spouse never gives you gifts, then you may begin to question his/her feelings toward you. If your partner/spouse needs regular quality time when he/she feels that you are really listening, and you express love to him/her with gifts instead, he/she may be convinced that you really do not love him/her. Situations like these can cause gradual erosion in your relationship. Below are the primary Love Languages and the types of actions that can express love to your partner/spouse effectively for his/her needs. The goal is to learn to practice all of them, but especially your partner’s/spouse’s primary one.

## Love Languages

1. **Give Words of Affirmation:** verbal compliments; words of appreciation; praise and encouragement; kind words; noticing and appreciating the other’s positive actions and qualities
2. **Give Gifts:** tangible objects freely offered; symbols that you were thought about; gifts of any size, shape, color, or price; visual symbol of love with no strings attached or to cover up a failure; given anytime, not just on special occasions
3. **Give Acts of Service:** willingly (not forcibly) do things for the other; offer helpfulness; timely and positive response to requests (not demands) of the other; acts of kindness; done with loving attitude (not fear, guilt, or resentment); acts that reflect equality and partnership
4. **Give Quality Time:** being available; doing something enjoyable and interactive together; giving uninterrupted, undivided, and focused attention; quality conversation in which both talk and listen; creating memorable moments; self-revealing intimacy
5. **Give Physical Touch:** loving (never abusive) physical contact at appropriate times and places; tender hugs, touches, or pats on the arm, shoulder, or back; back or foot rubs or massages; kissing; holding hands; holding while crying and comforting; intimate touch and sex only within the covenant of marriage with your marriage partner

## How to Identify Your Love Languages

It is wonderful if you can use all five of these Languages in your relationship and marriage (except for cautions about how you use the physical touch Love Language before marriage, of course). However, at times in life you may be very busy, with time and energy in short supply. When this occurs, it is especially important that you focus what time you do have on giving your partner's/spouse's primary Love Language to him/her. For this reason, you will find it helpful to identify the primary love language that works best for each other. Here are some ways that you can determine what **your primary love language** is:

- Observe your own behavior so that you notice how you typically express love and appreciation to others; 75 percent of people express what they most want to receive
- Observe what you request of others, which will indicate what emotional needs you may need the other to meet
- Make note of your own complaints about what you do not receive
- Ask yourself what your spouse says and does that you have a positive response to

If you want to determine the **love language of someone else**, the method is similar:

- Observe his/her expressions, complaints, and requests
- Ask questions
- Experiment with offering various expressions of love and observe and listen to the responses

**Note:** If someone received all five Love Languages consistently when growing up—or none of them—it may be difficult for him/her as an adult to isolate and identify just one primary Love Language.

### Love Languages for Both You and Your Partner/Spouse

**Complete the following questions individually:**

1. Which Love Language most effectively communicates to me that my partner/spouse loves me? Which is the next most effective?

Primary: \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Am I receiving the Language I most need from my partner/spouse? \_\_\_\_\_ How do I feel and respond when my partner/spouse gives me love through this Language?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How do I feel and respond if my partner/spouse uses one of the Love Languages but rarely does the one that means the most to me?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What do I think are the primary and secondary Love Languages of my partner/spouse?

Primary: \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which Love Language is most comfortable for me to use with my partner/spouse? Which one do I use most often?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does it match what I identified as the primary Language of my partner/spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What can I do to strengthen my ability to practice the Language my partner/spouse most appreciates?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What are possibilities that I can do or say that will fill my partner's/spouse's "love tank"?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Couple Reflection and Discussion:**

1. We agree our primary Love Languages are:

His: \_\_\_\_\_

Hers: \_\_\_\_\_

2. We are still uncertain about the Love Languages that are most important to us, and we will clarify our needs by doing the following:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Courting Couples Only—We will fill each other’s “love tank” during *courtship* in the following ways:

His: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Hers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. We will fill each other’s “love tank” during *marriage* in the following (additional) ways:

His: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Hers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. If we are consistent with expressing our love to one another through the Love Languages, and with keeping each other’s “love tank” full, we will experience these outcomes in our marriage:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# ***The Practice of Equality Within Marriage***

1. **“Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. ... Verily God created women for men, and men for women.”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Women”*, p. 379)
2. **“Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other.... Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all!”** (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 162)
3. **“Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.”** (On behalf of The Universal House of Justice, 1992, “Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children”)

**Equality is** a balanced and respectful partnership between people who work together as a team and honor the mind, heart, and soul of each.

## **I practice Equality effectively when I:**

- Communicate my thoughts and feelings and encourage a partner/spouse to do the same
- Listen carefully to a partner/spouse
- Honor and appreciate the full participation of my partner/spouse in our relationship
- Regard both my partner/spouse and myself as valuable human beings
- Determine in a fair-minded and equitable manner our roles and how we will handle joint responsibilities
- Discuss issues and make decisions with my partner/spouse
- Learn new skills to increase balance between my partner/spouse and me

## **I need to strengthen Equality when I:**

- Give orders to, make demands of, or try to dominate or control others
- Act as if I am superior or inferior to another
- Expect a partner/spouse to do my fair share of tasks as well as his or her own
- Insist that our roles and responsibilities be identical
- Hold back important information or feelings related to a discussion or decision because I think my input is not valuable or legitimate

## **I misuse the strength of Equality when I:**

- Ignore, belittle, devalue, or hesitate to point out our authentic differences
- Inconsistently change my expectations, opinions about, and actions related to what our roles or responsibilities should be, creating confusion and disruption in our relationship/marriage

(Adapted Excerpt from *Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship*, p. 425)

# Worksheet: Marital Behavior and Equality

(Adapted Excerpt from *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, Third Edition, Chapter 21)

**Purpose:** To identify some of your attitudes and beliefs about how you behave in your marriage, and to assess whether these attitudes and beliefs uphold and reflect the spiritual principle of the equality of women and men.

**Instructions:**

- A) Complete this worksheet individually, and then share and discuss your responses with your partner.
- B) Reflect on the behaviors listed in column 1. Then use the scale below to note whether you consistently speak *and* act that way. The scale ranges from 1 (never demonstrating the behavior) to 5 (always demonstrating the behavior).
- C) Use the Notes column to record any of your conclusions or concerns to share in your discussion.

<b>Never</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Always</b>
	←—————→					

<b>My Behavior Within Our Marriage</b>	<b>Rating (Level of Action)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
I listen seriously and attentively to my spouse’s opinions, thoughts, and expressions of feelings		
I share information that is helpful and empowering to the other		
I compliment my spouse and appreciate and encourage his/her talents, work, and projects		
I involve my spouse in full consultative decision-making on both large and small issues		
I take the initiative to restore harmony after an argument or problem		
I accept and admit my mistakes and make amends for them to my spouse		
I show pride in my spouse and pay attention to my spouse in public or in a group		
I consistently try to please my spouse and to demonstrate caring for his/her well-being and happiness		
I try to change my inconsiderate or lazy habits and make changes in my character		
I fulfill my share of the household responsibilities		
I behave as a fully involved parent		
I demonstrate responsibility for the education and discipline of our children/stepchildren		

My Behavior Within Our Marriage	Rating (Level of Action)	Notes
I encourage my spouse to further his/her education		
I flexibly accept changes in roles and responsibilities		
I demonstrate sensitivity to my spouse's physical and sexual needs		
I share recreation, social, and quality time regularly with my spouse		
I give my spouse emotional support		
I respectfully communicate thoughts and feelings to my spouse		
Other _____		
Other _____		

**Reflection and Couple Discussion:**

1. What attitudes and behaviors indicate my/our willingness and ability to practice equality in our marriage?

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2. What concerns do I/we have about the practice of equality in our marriage?

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3. What new actions and personal growth am I/are we willing to initiate to improve my/our practice of equality in our marriage and in all aspects of our lives?

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## Practical Ways for Individuals and Couples to Support Relationships and Marriages

**Note:** Any relationship/marriage education effort can include people of all faiths: as organizers, facilitators, and participants. When doing an activity, look for ways to connect it to the work of the Five Year Plan/Core Activities.

1. Pray for your own current or future marriage. Pray for the relationships and marriages of others.
2. Participate in individual and couple pre-marriage education and marriage strengthening study and education.
3. Identify the knowledge and skills you can gain from core activities that will apply in your current or future relationship/marriage, set goals to gain them, and participate.
4. Learn about the Bahá'í laws related to marriage and the spiritual and administrative outcome of disobeying them.
5. Work cooperatively with your local Spiritual Assembly to obtain marriage education materials and to request an Assembly officiate your wedding; ask their advice as needed.
6. Maintain daily healthy practices together that assist the marriage to stay strong and happy; such as, praying, consulting and prioritizing, reading about character qualities, and having fun.
7. Encourage married couples you know to seek help promptly when they are experiencing difficulties.
8. Mentor engaged and newlywed couples.
9. Encourage parents to participate in parenting skills training that helps them to model an excellent marriage for their children.
10. Respect and fully participate in the parental consent process for marriage.
11. Participate in marriage preparation or marriage strengthening workshops.
12. Attend seasonal Bahá'í schools and learning events that include relationship and marriage content, or regard the event as relationship or marriage nurturing time together.
13. Incorporate character (virtues) education in all core activities for all ages; children's classes can contain a character component, devotional meetings can focus on character qualities as themes, junior youth groups can incorporate character education, and study circles include character qualities naturally in their content.
14. Offer childcare to a couple so that they can spend marriage-strengthening time together.
15. Set up or participate in study sessions using the Universal House of Justice compilations, "A Chaste and Holy Life" and "Preserving Bahá'í Marriages."
16. Have the readings and prayers during the spiritual portion of a 19-Day Feast relate to marriage.
17. Hold a devotional meeting about marriage.
18. Hold a fireside about marriage.
19. Commemorate your own wedding anniversary and the wedding anniversaries of friends and relatives.
20. Facilitate sessions for junior youth that assist them to prepare for relationships and marriage.
21. Facilitate sessions for youth and young adults on the topics of relationships and marriage.
22. Prepare and present research papers on marriage at Association of Bahá'í Studies conferences.
23. Develop the arts in support of marriage (Examples: music, stories, poetry, painting, drama...).
24. Request local libraries and bookstores to carry books on marriage preparation and marriage.

### ***Core Activities Connection and Time Management***

Bahá'u'lláh encourages people to "...exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216) In this context, Bahá'ís might consider systematically assessing their total use of time and prioritization, as there are "limited time and energies" (Universal House of Justice, November 14, 2005). After considering the time they spend on marriage, family, work, play, sleep, and so on, Bahá'ís can then clearly assess how many remaining hours they can dedicate to the work of the Five Year Plan each week, which includes the core activities and programs of growth.

Maintaining balance in life is a challenge. It is possible with creativity and intentionality to incorporate some aspects of relationship and marriage education into the core activities. It is also possible and wise for couples and families to consider the health of their relationship and families as a priority while being involved in fulfilling the goals of the plans of the Universal House of Justice.

If individuals and couples need assistance with assessing and managing their time and service priorities, there are detailed worksheets in the Marriage Transformation Project's books *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!* and *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage*.

# Thank you for your courteous and enthusiastic participation!

## About the Marriage Transformation Project

The Marriage Transformation Project is a Bahá'í-inspired global social and economic development project committed to marriage education and marriage skill building for people at all stages of relationships. A key focus of the project is developing materials that assist people before marriage to know one another's characters and encourage couples after marriage to continue developing their character qualities. Materials to assist parents with developing children's characters are also available and under development.

In addition to its own independent work in developing materials, Marriage Transformation draws on the work of marriage researchers and experts. It also derives part of its inspiration and content from the teachings of the world's religions, especially as they relate to character qualities. These include the following faiths: Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim.

**Project Founders:** Susanne Alexander, President, is working full time on this project without salary, with an occasional paid contractor who assists with the website, newsletter, and book layout. She creates most of the books and materials that the project publishes, often with coauthors. Her husband, Craig Farnsworth, serves part-time as Secretary-Treasurer, with the primary responsibility of managing the finances and business affairs of the company and the distribution of books. Both Susanne and Craig are trained relationship/marriage coaches with a specialty in character. They facilitate workshops and offer relationship coaching together.

**Project Purpose:** Empowering people to create happy, lasting, character-based marriages—the foundation of a prosperous, unified world.

**Mission Possible for Transforming Marriages:** We are committed to creating practical resources and powerful learning opportunities focused on character to support successful marriage preparation, and to sustain and balance the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of married life.

**Project Funding:** The income for the project comes primarily from book and product sales, with a small amount from workshops. At times, committed individuals (primarily family members) have made contributions to the principals of the project to support the high costs of book creation and publishing and the necessary overhead expenses of running a home office and book distribution center. In March 2004, the project was set up as a corporation, so financial contributions cannot be made under U.S. Internal Revenue Service laws to Marriage Transformation, only to the principals of the company as individuals, who can then transfer and use the money for company purposes (contact Susanne Alexander, President, [susanne@marriagetransformation.com](mailto:susanne@marriagetransformation.com)). Those providing financial assistance to the company do not become shareholders or principals of the company and cannot direct the company's actions. We are committed to use all funds in support of the company purpose and mission, and we appreciate people's commitment to participating financially.

### We encourage you to stay in touch with the Marriage Transformation Project:

We offer a free monthly e-newsletter, and you can sign up for it on the home page of our website, [www.marriagetransformation.com](http://www.marriagetransformation.com), or on the slip of paper provided. The website also has many great resource recommendations and products for sale in our online store. We also welcome volunteers for all of our materials/books editing teams.

We are happy to work with anyone on supplying materials for your needs, and we provide discounts for purchases of books for groups/resale. We are also happy to work with anyone wishing to use our materials or modify them for a particular couple, group, purpose, or grant application.

Loving regards,  
*Susanne Alexander and Craig Farnsworth*  
Marriage Transformation Project