

# Marriage Rut or Rescue? Ask These 10 Best Questions to Find Out

## Highlight

Want to get your marriage mojo back? Asking yourself the right questions is a great start.

## The 10 Best Questions

This is the shorthand version. Experts' suggested best answers are below.

1. Do we play the “blame game?” Can we ask each other for a fresh start?
2. Do I feel constantly criticized and belittled by my partner?
3. Do we keep arguing over and over again about the same things? What’s the real elephant in the room?
4. Does boredom rule our marriage?
5. Am I afraid to be vulnerable around my partner?
6. Has sex fallen off our “to do” list?
7. Have one or both of us considered being unfaithful or been unfaithful -- in real life or online?
8. Are we still best friends?
9. How well do we handle good news? Are you there for me when things go *right*?
10. What’s the balance in our “love bank account”?

## The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

How can I love my partner more?

## The 10 Best Answers

### 1. Do we play the “blame game?” Can we ask each other for a fresh start?

Marriage ruts are often characterized by weariness about life’s disappointments and stresses.

Relationship counselor John Gray writes in *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, “Look inside yourself for solutions. We often blame our partners for things that are not their fault at all.”

Dr. Harville Hendrix, author of the longtime bestseller, *Getting the Love You Want*, agrees. “Stop all shame, blame, and criticism. Instead, ask for what you want in a clear, specific, and positive manner. Express appreciation for your partner.”

## **2. Do I feel constantly criticized and belittled by my partner?**

Renowned therapist Dr. John Gottman, author of *The Relationship Cure*, believes that chronic criticism causes most marriage collapses. He says, “Change your thoughts from a critical habit of mind, in which you're very involved with your partner's mistakes, to a positive one, in which you catch him doing something right. Change your interaction patterns from escalating negativity and criticism to building a culture of appreciation.”

[Related: Deal Effectively with Criticism by Asking These 10 Best Questions](#)

## **3. Do we keep arguing over and over again about the same things? What's the real elephant in the room?**

It's time to slay those elephants – the ugly, hairy problems you never discuss or acknowledge. Experienced counselor Terry Gaspard says, “Sweeping issues under the rug only works for so long.”

Recurring arguments often mask deeper resentments. “A common mistake,” says nationally-syndicated advice columnist Carolyn Hax, “is to focus on small items that make up your life. ‘We need to do X for the kids, Z is necessary for my job,’ because these small, incremental decisions let us leave the bigger, scarier, grayer issues entirely unaddressed.”

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## **4. Does boredom rule our marriage?**

Research by Professor Terri Orbuch (a.k.a. “The Love Doctor”) at the University of Michigan discovered that simple boredom can wound long-term relationships because it undermines closeness.

Celebrity psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw agrees. He says, “Bored people are boring. Find a passion, get energized, and make time together to rediscover your love and commitment for one another.”

## **5. Am I afraid to be vulnerable around my partner?**

Gaspard believes hiding your private world can signal marital problems. She says, “A healthy intimate relationship is built on trust and vulnerability which involves sharing your innermost feelings, thoughts, and wishes.”

Ask yourself: what am I keeping from my partner? Why? Would I regret telling him/her?

[Related: What's My Emotional Intelligence? Ask Yourself These 10 Best Questions](#)

## **6. Has sex fallen off our “to do” list?**

Sure, sex changes as a relationship moves beyond the hot honeymoon stage. But physical intimacy is no less important. Clinical sexologist Ian Kerner, author of *She Comes First*, suggested this question in a 2006 interview with the QDoc:

- Do we have realistic expectations about our sex lives?

Kerner says, “One of the greatest services you can do for a guy is to reassure him that he doesn’t have to make love like a porn star. Show him how to enjoy sex like a woman: creative, non-genital based. Lead him beyond his penis to be more fully engaged – mind, body, and soul.”

## **7. Have one or both of us considered being unfaithful or been unfaithful -- in real life or online?**

Cheating? Dr. Phil says there are distinct warning signs. “Remember that people who have nothing to hide, hide nothing. Look for a shift in patterns, accessibility, money, reliability and secrecy. A sudden great interest in grooming or dress, going to the gym, or putting on cologne.”

[Related: Cheat or Not? Ask Yourself These 10 Best Questions Before Being Unfaithful](#)

## **8. Are we still best friends?**

One of the biggest mistakes couples make is to have meaningful conversations only during crises. Experts agree that genuine friendship is the foundation to long-term happiness.

“To achieve success as a couple, both parties must be willing to foster the friendship and work through who needs what from whom,” according to Dr. Phil. “In a solid, underlying friendship, you talk, laugh, share, and do things together. Don't stop being friends just because you're each other's spouse.”

## **9. How well do we handle good news? Are you there for me when things go *right*?**

How one partner reacts to the other’s good fortune may be even more revealing than how you fight. Good news can be good relationship medicine.

Research psychologist Dr. Shelly Gable at UCLA concluded, “Celebrating a partner’s promotion together, for example, is a terrific bond. But when one partner downplayed, belittled, or was indifferent to the other’s happiness, the result was often a lasting chill in the relationship.”

Who knows? This might be the dirty little secret behind Hollywood power couples’ breakups – no shared joy about their partners’ newest blockbuster hit movie.

[Related: Do I Really Want a Job Promotion? The 10 Best Questions to Help Decide](#)

## 10. What's the balance in our "love bank account"?

This question originated from work by therapist John Gottman. He describes relationships like bank accounts with positive and negative emotional interactions mentally socked away.

Gottman explains, "It's whether the good moments of mutual pleasure, passion, humor, support, and generosity outweigh the bad moments of complaining, criticism, anger, disgust, defensiveness and coldness. All couples have conflict, but it's ratio of positive to negative interactions during arguments that becomes the critical factor."

### The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

### How can I love my partner more?

Teacher Randy Fujishin writes in *Gifts from the Heart*, "Asking questions is a very effective way of inviting a loved one to open up, explore, and even solve problems."

"One of the most powerful questions I've ever heard is, 'How can I love you more?' Ask this question of a loved one and see where the answer takes you," says Fujishin.

### QDoc's Q-Tipster

Dr. Phil says that you need to turn toward your partner, not away, to fix a problem inside a relationship. The QDoc adds: pay attention to your questions. Love more by asking more loving questions.

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