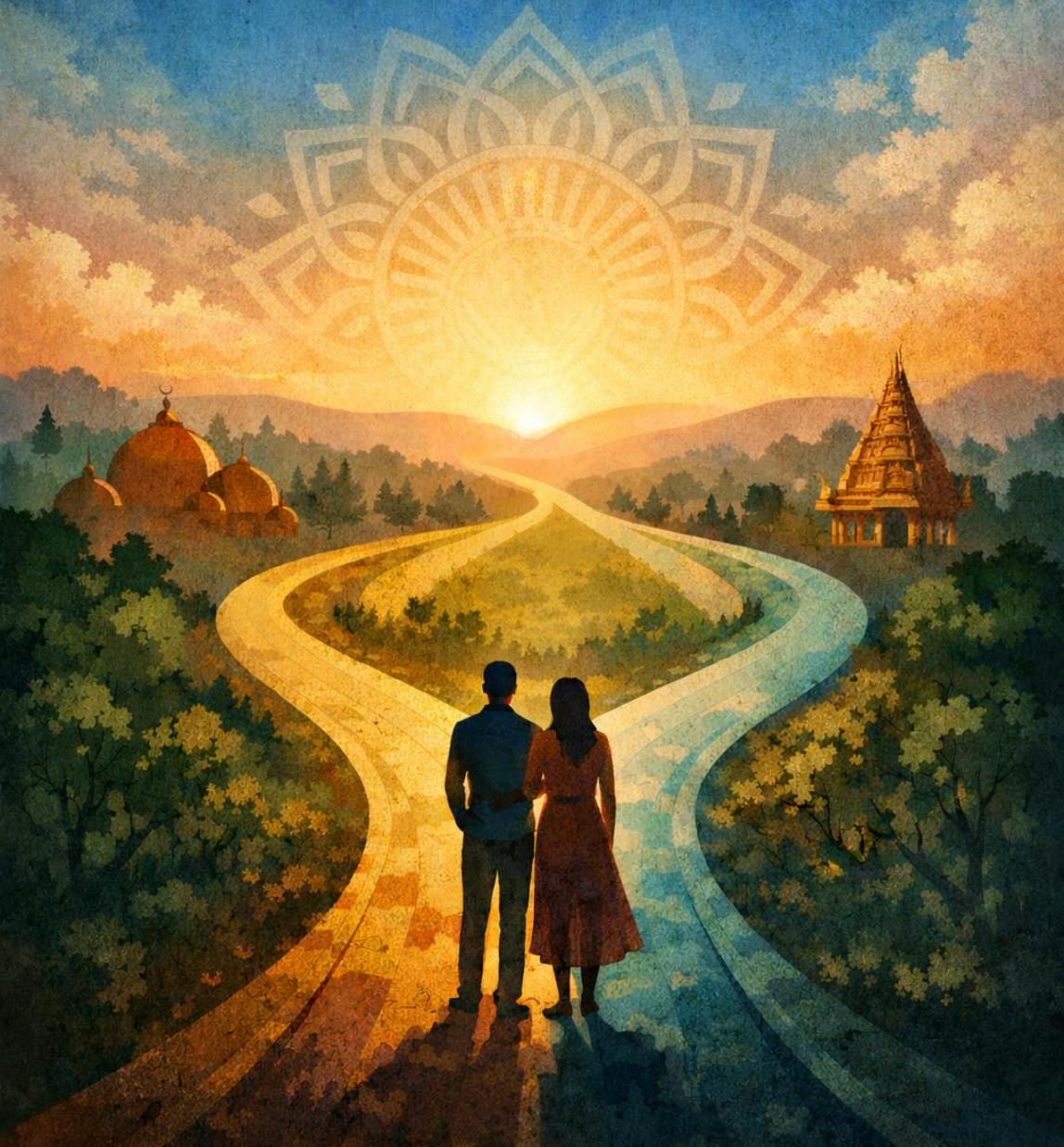


# Critical Conversations *Before Marriage*

A Counselor's guide for within-faith and  
interfaith couples and families



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## **Critical Conversations Before Marriage Introduction:**

This booklet is a practical guide for couples considering marriage—**within-faith** (☐) or **interfaith**—and for the counselors, mentors, and facilitators who support them. Marriage is a major life commitment that brings together personal values, careers, family expectations, and cultural or religious traditions. Thoughtful preparation and open communication before marriage help couples build a strong, respectful, and resilient foundation.

Pre-marital conversations are not meant to question love, but to strengthen it. By addressing important topics early, couples can clarify expectations, surface assumptions, and develop healthy ways to navigate differences. **All couples can benefit from the questions marked ☐**, while couples in interfaith or intercultural relationships are encouraged to pay special attention to sections marked ☐☐, where additional clarity and intentional planning are often needed.

Drawing on more than 20 years of experience guiding over 1,300 youth and families, [Dr. Dilip Amin](#) offers this booklet as a tool for honest dialogue, informed decision-making, and mutual respect. The questions are designed to promote reflection and meaningful conversation—not quick or perfect answers—so couples can enter marriage with awareness, confidence, and shared understanding.

**Version: February 1, 2026**  
(find the updated latest version [here](#))

## Chapter 1: Disclosures and Transparency

Trust is built on honesty and openness. Addressing sensitive topics early helps prevent future distress.

- Have you disclosed past significant relationships? If not, what is your mutual understanding about learning about them in the future?
- Is there any significant medical or mental health history (your own or among close blood relatives) that should be shared?
- Depression and mood disorders can be hereditary and can profoundly affect marital life. Are there such concerns in either family?
- Have you ever had, or do you currently have, challenges related to alcohol use, recreational or illicit drug use, or tobacco/nicotine use?
- Are there immigration, residency, or visa-related matters that may affect your future together?
- Are there any immigration-related actions (for example, filing for permanent residency or another legal status) that you expect or would like your spouse to take after marriage?

### Notes:

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## Chapter 2: Prior Marriages

- Is this your first marriage? If not, on what date was your previous divorce finalized?
- Do you need a dispensation documentation from your religious institute for the second marriage?
- Do you have children from a prior relationship or marriage?
  - Do you have any ongoing financial obligations under a separation or divorce agreement?
  - Will any of your children be living with you?
  - Do you have financial responsibilities related to education or college expenses?
- Do you have a will that addresses children's financial support and custody arrangements?

**Example:** Mr. X and Ms. Y, both with children from prior relationships and without a will, marry. In an unfortunate accident, Ms. Y dies unexpectedly. By law, her assets and custody of her children transfer to the surviving spouse, Mr. X. The following day, Mr. X also passes away. As a result, all combined assets and custody of all children transfer to Mr. X's parents, siblings or ex-wife. This outcome may not reflect Ms. Y's intentions or her family's expectations. Couples are strongly encouraged to consult a qualified attorney to ensure their wishes are clearly documented.

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## Chapter 3: Wedding Ceremony

- What kind of wedding ceremony or ceremonies do you envision?
- Will you be comfortable having the complete ritual as your parents expect, or would you prefer a shorter or modified version?
- Will one or both of you want a Hindu wedding and/or a ceremony from another faith tradition?
- Which rituals and ceremonies are you comfortable participating in?
- Will the ceremony require one partner to formally or informally convert to another faith?
- Is there any expectation of [circumcision](#) for an uncircumcised partner?
- Are you willing to [change your religion](#), even in name only?
- If you plan to raise your family in the Hindu faith, consider discussing a Hindu pre-nuptial understanding: <https://interfaithshaadi.org/hindu-prenuptial-agreement/>
- In a Hindu wedding, extended family participation is integral. Are you comfortable with relatives playing active ceremonial roles?
- Will either partner change their first name, last name and/or add a new name for or after the marriage?

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## Chapter 4: Wedding Expenses

- What is your overall wedding budget, and how will expenses be shared?
- Will one or both sets of parents contribute financially? If so, are you comfortable inviting their friends or extended family?
- In many Hindu traditions, weddings are community affairs. How will you balance family expectations with financial realities?
- How will you finalize the guest list while respecting parental wishes and budget constraints?

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## Chapter 5: Family Location and Living Choices

- Where do you envision settling after marriage?
- If one partner receives a strong career opportunity in another state or country, how would you decide whether to move?
- Would both partners consider the other's career needs before pursuing major opportunities?
- Would you prefer to live close to parents? If so, whose and where?
- Are you considering living with parents or in-laws? If yes, will the kitchen and living spaces be shared or separate (e.g., Accessory Dwelling Unit or ADU)?
- Would proximity to a religious institution be important to either of you?

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## Chapter 6: Food and Diet at Home

- Will most meals be home-cooked, ordered in, or eaten out?
- Who will prepare meals (breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner) and handle cleanup, grocery shopping, and household supplies?
- What dietary practices will be followed at home?
- Is either partner vegetarian or vegan?
- Will there be restrictions on eggs, chicken, beef, pork, or alcohol in the home?
- Will the household follow non-tamsik, kosher, halal, or other dietary guidelines?
- How will you adjust when parents visit and prefer specific traditional foods?
- How will you handle situations where parents are uncomfortable with certain foods in the home?
- How do you approach health, exercise, and preventive care?

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## Chapter 7: Home and Division of Responsibilities

- What expectations do you have about household roles and responsibilities?
- Would you prefer traditional role divisions or an equitable sharing of domestic and childcare tasks?
- Are both partners planning to work after marriage?
- How will responsibilities change during illness, pregnancy, or career transitions?

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## Chapter 8: Politics, Media, and Entertainment

- Are you comfortable discussing politics at home?
- How will you handle political discussions involving parents or guests?
- Where do you broadly align politically or ideologically?
- How important is staying engaged with news from India or global affairs?
- Do differences in entertainment preferences (e.g., Bollywood, regional cinema, sports) matter to you?
- Are you comfortable if grandparents share photos of your children on Facebook and other media?
- How much time do you expect to spend on TV, devices, or entertainment at home?

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## Chapter 9: Friendship and Open Communication

A strong marriage rests on friendship, kindness, and mutual respect.

- Will you prioritize your spouse alongside parents, friends, and work?
- How do you balance career demands with family time, health, and personal well-being?
- If one spouse experiences prolonged work-related stress over several months, how will the couple recognize and address its impact on the relationship?
- Do you feel safe expressing concerns and vulnerabilities?
- How do you communicate anger, disappointment, affection, and appreciation?
- What boundaries do you expect regarding friendships, including with the opposite sex?
- What behaviors are unacceptable during conflict?
- How do you view counseling or therapy if needed?
- Do you see marriage as a partnership of equals in voice and agency?

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## Chapter 10: Extended Family

- How much involvement with extended family do you expect?
- How often would you like to see in-laws?
- How would you feel if in-laws came and spent several months with you, especially from overseas?
- Are you comfortable with parents staying for extended periods, especially around childbirth?
- How will holidays and festivals be divided?
- How will you handle well-meaning but intrusive advice?
- Will you be able to make adjustments without resentment toward your spouse?

**Notes:**

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## Chapter 11: Community Involvement

- How important is community life to each of you?
- Do you prefer frequent social engagements or a quieter lifestyle?
- Will your community include mandir, church, synagogue, or mosque involvement?

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## Chapter 12: Respect for Each Other's Families

- How will you support each other when conflicts with in-laws arise?
- How will financial or caregiving expectations toward parents be handled fairly?
- What if one partner needs distance from the other's family—how would you manage that?

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## Chapter 13: Children

- Do you plan to have children? When?
- How many children would each of you like?
- What parenting values do you want to carry forward or avoid?
- Who will be the primary caregiver?
- Will grandparents or a nanny help?
- What languages will the children speak?
- What naming traditions will you follow? What will be the first, middle and last names?
- [What religion\(s\)](#) will the children follow?
- Will children undergo religious rites of passage ([Bris/Bar Mitzvah](#), [Christening/Baptism](#), [Shahadah/Sunat](#), Namasanskara, etc.)?
- Will children attend religious classes, Sunday school, Bal Vihar, madrasa, synagogue, church, or none?
- How do you view reproductive choices (e.g. early termination) in medical emergencies? Do you have to get buy-in for reproductive choices from your religious institute?

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## Chapter 14: Support During Crisis

- Whom would you turn to during family or personal crises?
- How will you support aging or ill parents?

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## Chapter 15: Finances

- What debts or obligations (e.g. student loan, prior marriage) do you bring into marriage?
- Do you feel any financial obligation to someone who supported you in your difficult times?
- How will income, expenses, and savings be managed?
- If necessary, do you believe in borrowing money from the credit card company at high interest rates?
- Do you believe in spending money wisely and save them for the retirement or do you believe in spending money now for your comfort and luxuries but have confidence to earn more later to support that current lifestyle?
- How will you plan for retirement, education, and emergencies?
- Will you commingle all your earnings, or would you prefer to have individual as well as joint accounts and use a joint account for household expenses?
- How do you feel about each partner sending money home (India, if that is the case) to help the parents on a regular basis?
- If one partner earns lots more than another, how will you split expenses?
- Will you be making religious contributions (in some cases, it could be 3-12% of your gross family income)?
- How will inheritance, parental support, and charitable giving be handled?
- Are you open to discussing a prenuptial financial agreement?
- Will and Inheritance: How will your own assets be distributed in ways that align with values and legal systems?

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## Chapter 16: Approach to Conflict Resolution

- Will you set aside regular time for difficult conversations?
- Will you identify trusted mediators if conflicts escalate?

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## Chapter 17: Religion(s) at Home

- Do you consider yourself an atheist or non-religious? Would it concern you if your spouse practices or follows religious beliefs?
- How was your childhood religious experience? Did you attend mandir, synagogue or a church every week?
- Today, how central is religion or spirituality in your life?
- What rituals and symbols (e.g. a photo of Kaaba, Cross or Ganesh) will be present at home?
- Are you comfortable with a Hindu God's murti ([idol](#)) displayed in the home?
- What rituals, prayers, fasting, or worship practices do you expect to continue after marriage?
- Is there any expectation or against for hijab, burka, sari, bindi, tilak, etc.? Will this be once-a-while on a special holiday or will it be a routine daily practice?
- Will you be willing to accompany your spouse to temple, mosque, or church, or offer prayers on occasions such as Diwali or Christmas?
- How will you participate in each other's religious observances?
- If a religious practice involves animal sacrifice or killing, do you have any objections to participating in or being present for such a ceremony?
- What religion(s) would you like the children to follow?
- Can children follow [two faiths](#) and equally?
- How will you manage grandparents sharing religious stories and traditions with children?
- What role will [religious institutions](#) play in marital decisions?

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## Chapter 18: Festivals and Holidays

- How will major religious and cultural holidays be celebrated?
- What are your expectations around gifts and expenses?
- How will time be divided during major holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas major holidays?

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## Chapter 19: Rites of Passage

- Will children participate in faith-based rites, such as baptism, [circumcision](#), [bar mitzvah](#) or namasanskara?
- How do you understand the religious implications of these rites?
- Can children have rites of passages from [both faiths](#) (e.g., baptism and namasanskara)?

**Notes:**

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## Chapter 20: Final Rites

- What are your beliefs about afterlife, like Judgment Day or rebirth?
- Preferences for burial or cremation?
- Will religious ceremonies be performed after death?

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## Chapter 21: Alignment with Parents

- Are your parents aware of and aligned with your decisions and boundaries?
- Have you communicated these expectations clearly and respectfully?

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## Chapter 22: Additional Reading and Resources

- URL link to **this document**: <https://interfaithshaadi.org/critical-conversations-before-marriage/> (share, download or for the latest version)
- HSCI Marriage Series: <https://www.hsciglobal.org/getting-married.html#/>
- Hindu Pandit Training Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOasyVtlpk4>
- Hindu Pre-Nuptial Understanding: <https://interfaithshaadi.org/hindu-prenuptial-agreement/>
- Perspectives on Interfaith Marriage between Dharmic-Abrahamic traditions (30 articles by Dr. Dilip Amin) <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/equalityforhappiness/author/damin>
- Book: Hindu Vivaha (by HMEC, Dr. Amin is a co-author) <https://www.amazon.com/Hindu-Wedding-Ceremony-Council-America/dp/0979350131>
- Book: Interfaith Marriage: Share and Respect with Equality by Dr. Dilip Amin <https://www.amazon.com/Interfaith-Marriage-Share-Respect-Equality/dp/1988207207>
- Course offered by Dr. Amin: Visit [Hindu University of America](http://www.hinduuniversityofamerica.com).

## Chapter 23: End Notes

*This guide is intended as a living document. Counselors are encouraged to adapt language and emphasis based on each couple's cultural, religious, and personal context.*

### **Marriage begins long before the wedding day.**

*Critical Conversations Before Marriage* is a practical, counselor-guided framework designed to help couples explore the most important—and often avoided—topics before they marry. Covering family expectations, finances, faith, children, conflict resolution, and cultural identity, this guide equips counselors and mentors with structured questions that foster clarity, honesty, and mutual respect.

Particularly relevant for interfaith and intercultural couples, the booklet acknowledges the realities of extended families, religious traditions, and diaspora life, while offering a neutral, respectful space for dialogue. Rather than prescribing answers, it empowers couples to make informed, conscious decisions together.

This booklet is deal for:

- Engaged couples seeking depth and clarity
- Marriage counselors and therapists
- Clergy and spiritual leaders
- Interfaith mentors and educators

For the latest version of this document, visit  
<https://interfaithshaadi.org/critical-conversations-before-marriage/>  
or write to [InterfaithShaadi@gmail.com](mailto:InterfaithShaadi@gmail.com).