

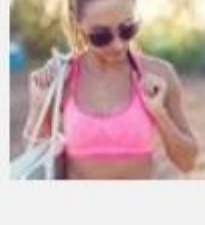
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## The Million-Dollar Question: Should You Marry Him?

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Four tough questions you should ask before you tie the knot.



You've been together forever. Moving to the "next level" is clearly on the horizon, yet... *those doubts* have been bubbling just below the surface for as long as you can remember. Is this the guy you're meant to spend forever after with? Before he pops the question (um, or before you say yes, only to have regrets later), take a breather and listen up. Here are the four questions you should ask yourself, according to the relationship gurus.



Peter Booth

### Am I saying "Yes" to him—or to a fantasy?

You've watched enough *Say Yes to the Dress* to have gotten a taste of that grand bridal salon experience. But because women in the U.S. are often raised on happily-ever-after stories that end with a couple riding off into the sunset, we tend to aim for that sunset rather than carefully considering the relationship that comes before and, most importantly, after it, says Dr. Amelia Romanowsky, a clinical psychologist.

She cautions women to first determine whether they've left the "honeymoon phase" of the relationship. "Only as partners move from the first phase of fantasy to more knowledge of their partner do they start to realize that love is a lot about moving from disconnection to repair," Romanowsky shares. Have you had—and respectfully resolved—a disagreement? Have you talked about what you both want out of your futures? If not, task yourself with figuring out how you'll handle those real-life issues before you sign up for the long haul.



### Am I still waiting for him to change?

You might have successfully trained him to drop his dirty towels in the hamper, but if he's a neo-conservative or a homebody—those are things that probably aren't going to change. Ever. So, can you live with that for the rest of your life—but more importantly, do you *want* to?

Remember: "The audition process should not go on forever," says Dr. Stan Tatkin, author of *Your Brain on Love*. If you've been with your mate for longer than a year, you should "know if your partnership is good enough to carry forward long into the future," he adds. "Partners that still hold out because this or that feature they don't like still exists should give up trying to make the other partner change."

Keep in mind that if he's not interested in hearing your concerns, that's an issue, too. "The most important quality for a relationship to work is that both people are willing to work on themselves—to take feedback and consider the other's perspective," Romanowsky says.



### Will my friends be excited he's proposing?

"The beginning of all romantic relationships involves a neurochemistry that will shift once the relationship feels more permanent," explains Tatkin. You might feel addicted, even obsessed with your new guy, and this feeling can last for over a year. Vetting your new guy with trusted friends and family is an essential safety check against your altered judgment.

"Women (and men, too) put themselves in jeopardy if they do not vet their partners with their social network," Tatkin says. "You might think that this is a personal decision whether or not to marry, and of course it is. But what other people think does matter, as the couple will have to exist within both partners' social networks. Plus other people can spot red flags in ways partners in love may not be able to see."

We've all heard *My Best Friend's Wedding*-style stories about relationship saboteurs who throw wrenches into love lives because of jealousy. But if your best friends who've *always* had your back are telling you that they question his intentions or he's never respected your feelings, that's important information you need to listen to. If they aren't upfront about their concerns or can't quite put a finger on what's not right, ask them this: "Am I myself when I'm with him?" They'll know if you're holding back or morphing into some other person in his presence.



### Are we committed to the same future?

A crazy love affair is incredibly romantic—in the movies. But IRL, you need to know who the two of you are as a couple. Beyond love, attraction and common interests, it's the basic agreements you have as a couple that will allow you to protect each other going into the long future ahead, Tatkin asks. Attraction, common interests, and love can and will change as the years pass. But agreeing on certain things, like "we tell each other everything," will keep you bound.

But to know what agreements you want, you first have to know yourself. "The best relationships occur when two people are operating from a place of security and maturity," says Dr. Gail Gross, a behavioral psychologist. "Fewer divorces happen with people who marry after the age of 28. The reason is that you change less."

Once you know yourself, it's time to sync up with your partner. "Mutuality," Gross tells us, "is one of the most important ingredients for a happy relationship. Commitment, obligation and responsibility are central to mutuality." She urges you to ask if this person shares your values. "In reality, you can't have a relationship with someone who doesn't."

Now, do sub-par answers to our impromptu quiz mean a breakup is imminent? Not necessarily. But they should, at the very least, encourage you to evaluate whether you and your partner have what it takes to survive the challenges that will come your way.

