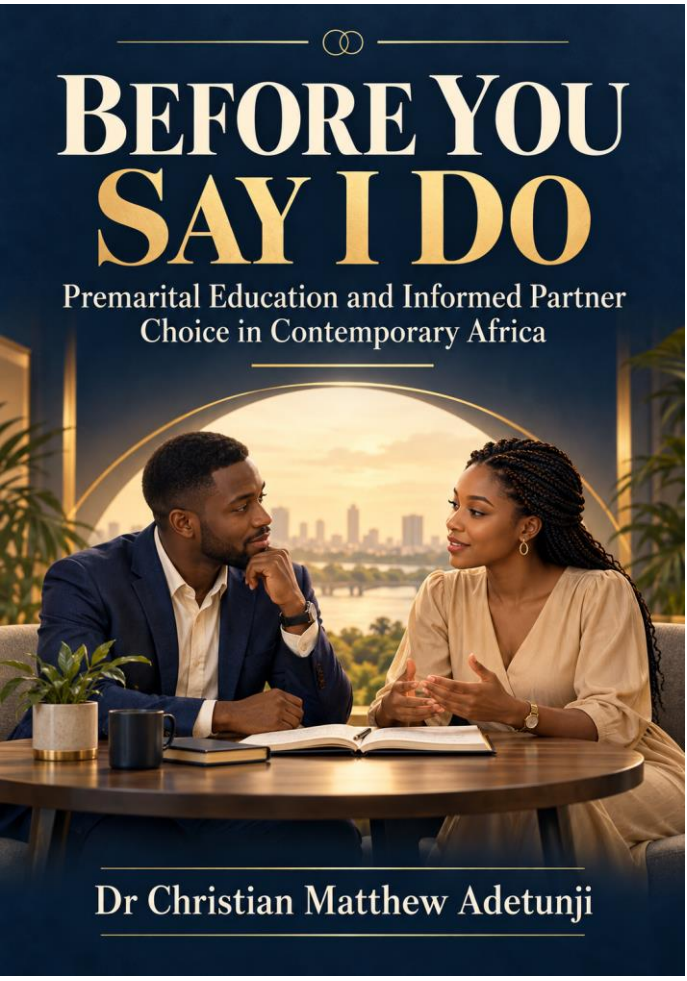

BEFORE YOU
SAY I DO
Premarital Education and Informed Partner Choice in Contemporary Africa
Dr Christian Matthew Adetunji

Before You Say I Do

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Dr Christian Matthew Adetunji

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The named cases and sample conversations are fictional. The wartime account in the opening chapter was related to me by the soldier's niece.

The exercises are for learning and reflection. Each chapter ends with its own reference list.

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Preface

A wedding can be planned in extraordinary detail while the couple has yet to discuss the life they intend to share. They may know the colour of the reception decorations and still have different ideas about family loyalty, money or privacy. This book invites partners to discuss those differences while they can still make a free and informed decision.

My work as a marriage counsellor has brought me into contact with people whose relationships began through many different routes. A friend, uncle, or cousin may introduce two people. Others meet at school, at work, at social functions, or through dating websites and social media. Some conduct almost their entire courtship online. Others arrange their wedding from different countries and meet physically only when the wedding takes place. Some enter marriages in absentia and relocate later to begin living together. These experiences raise an essential question: how can people make informed choices when familiarity, family endorsement, distance, attraction, or urgency may conceal what still needs to be understood?

Each route offers a different view of a prospective partner. An introduction may offer family context, online conversations can reveal beliefs and interests, and a long friendship can show how someone behaves over time. Chapter 4 looks at what each route leaves you still needing to learn.

I wrote this book for singles, couples, parents, pastors and counsellors across Africa. Family, faith and community can offer wisdom and practical support. The chapters draw on those strengths while asking how people can raise difficult questions and decide freely within the communities that matter to them.

The opening illustration is a wartime account related to me by a soldier's niece. I include it as her recollection of her uncle's experience and an illustration of hindsight.

Premarital education gives people time to understand a proposed commitment, learn practical skills and find support. The decision may be to marry, take more time or part. The choice belongs to the people who would enter the marriage.

Introduction

This book begins before the final choice of a marriage partner. Premarital education should be available to singles who are considering relationships, not reserved for couples who have already booked a venue. Once public announcements, payments, family negotiations, travel arrangements, or immigration expectations gather momentum, the freedom to reconsider can become harder to exercise. Early education creates space for thoughtful decisions before those pressures accumulate.

Three questions organise the book. Who am I bringing into this relationship? Who is the person I am considering? What kind of shared life can we responsibly build? Each question requires attention to individual history, relationships with others, present behaviour, future intentions, and the conditions under which consent is given. None can be answered adequately by attraction alone or by a third party's assurance.

Begin by examining your own needs, values and habits. Then learn about your prospective partner through conversation and ordinary shared experience. Bring what you learn into discussions about money, family, intimacy, faith, parenting, work and where you would live.

The book uses relational gaps as a practical way of examining differences in expectations, meanings, needs, roles, and values. A gap does not automatically make two people incompatible. Its

importance depends on what it concerns, how each partner responds, whether a workable agreement is possible, and whether either person would have to surrender safety or an essential conviction to continue. These questions provide an educational lens rather than a diagnostic test or a prediction formula.

The reflection questions and activities help readers turn what they learn into conversations and decisions. Pastors and parents can guide that work and help readers find qualified support when an issue requires clinical, legal or safeguarding expertise.

How the chapters build on one another

Chapters 1 to 3 explain why early preparation matters and help readers examine their own needs, family history and wider relationships.

Chapters 4 to 7 move from getting to know someone to asking difficult questions, evaluating compatibility and handling disagreement safely.

Chapters 8 to 10 turn those conversations into practical plans for married life, set out the role of parents and other guides, and help readers decide whether to proceed, pause or part.

Chapter 1

Before Commitment and Beyond Hindsight

The movement that could not change the past

A soldier's niece once told me how her uncle was injured during the Nigerian Civil War. He was distributing supplies when, according to her account, a Biafran fighter fired from a tree. Nearby soldiers saw the danger but would have exposed their position if they intervened. Her uncle tried to duck. A bullet struck him, and he lost an eye. Years later, as he told her the story, he showed her how he wished he had bent farther.

She remembered him demonstrating the movement five times. The account stayed with me because it captures the pain of returning to a moment in your mind when you can no longer act on it.

Whether he could have avoided the bullet is unknown. His injury was the result of an attack. His later account shows how powerful the wish for another chance can be.

The expression "medicine after death" captures the frustration of getting advice after an opportunity has passed. In marriage, support can still make a difference after the wedding. Couples can learn to repair harm and reorganise daily life, and individuals or children who need care or protection can still receive it.

Some decisions have lasting effects on finances, trust and family life. A question that seems obvious in hindsight may have been hard to ask before the wedding. Premarital education gives people a place to ask those questions while their answers can still shape the decision.

This is the starting point of premarital education. It invites people to move important understanding earlier. It gives them language for what they know, what they assume, what they need to discuss, and what remains uncertain. It also supports the freedom to respond to what they learn. Education has little value if a couple discovers a serious concern but everyone around them insists that the wedding must continue. Preparation must connect understanding with a genuine opportunity to decide.

Preparing for a life rather than an event

Wedding preparation is visible. Families discuss clothing, food, guests, transport, music, religious arrangements, and the reception. Financial contributions may be negotiated. Relatives may travel from another city or country. In some communities, several ceremonies bring different parts of the family together. These activities can express affection, belonging, and generosity. A wedding can be a valuable public affirmation of commitment. The problem arises when planning the event displaces preparation for the responsibilities that begin after it.

Marital preparation asks a different set of practical questions. Where will the couple live? What happens if one partner cannot find work? Who knows about existing debts? How will they support relatives? What does each person expect when exhausted, ill, disappointed, or afraid? What decisions require consultation? How will they disagree about money without humiliation? What happens when their wishes about children differ? These questions concern the ordinary conditions of shared life. Their importance does not depend on how impressive the ceremony will be.

Consider a fictional couple, Nneka and Daniel. They have agreed on a wedding date, chosen attendants, and paid several suppliers. Daniel believes marriage means that Nneka will move near his parents. Nneka believes they will remain in the city where she works. Each has spoken generally about building a home, but neither has specified its location. Their affection is real. Their agreement is incomplete. A discussion about residence now may be uncomfortable, yet postponing it will not make the underlying difference disappear.

If they raise the matter only after the wedding, the conversation may acquire additional weight. A decision about location may be heard as disloyalty, rejection of parents, disregard for employment, or failure to honour a promise. Before marriage, they still need to hear those meanings, but they can examine

them before living arrangements harden into expectation. They may find a suitable alternative. They may need more time. They may discover that their plans cannot be reconciled without a sacrifice one person cannot freely make.

Wedding readiness and marital readiness therefore overlap only partly. A couple can organise an event efficiently while struggling to share decisions. Another couple may have modest resources but a thoughtful plan for communication, household responsibility, family support, and seeking help. Neither financial simplicity nor ceremonial grandeur establishes the quality of a relationship. The question is whether the people entering it have engaged honestly with the life they intend to build and the realities they will bring into that life.

For pastors, counsellors, and parents, this distinction changes the timing of support. An invitation to prepare should come before deadlines make reflection feel disruptive. Singles can learn about partner choice long before engagement. Couples can begin structured conversations when a relationship becomes serious. If education starts only days before the wedding, facilitators should acknowledge the limited opportunity rather than pretend that a short meeting can substitute for careful preparation. The calendar should serve the decision, rather than determine it.

What premarital education should accomplish

Premarital education is a structured learning process that helps people understand themselves, examine a prospective partnership, practise relationship skills, and make informed decisions about marriage. It may take place individually, in groups, or with a couple. It may be supported by a church, a community programme, or a suitably trained professional. Its educational purpose is broader than completing a checklist. Participants should develop capacities they can use when the facilitator is no longer present.

One capacity is asking clear questions. An individual can feel that their partner has responsibilities without really understanding what those responsibilities entail. An individual can also call someone “spiritual” when they have no idea how faith informs their behaviour. Education will motivate people to turn general perceptions into something they can discuss. What responsibilities do you have? How do you respond when you fail someone? How do your convictions shape decisions involving people who disagree with you?

Another capacity is listening without immediately defending an existing conclusion. A hopeful partner may ask a question but reject any answer that threatens the wedding. Education invites a more honest posture. If an answer is unexpected, the next step is clarification rather than denial. What does that mean for our

future? Is this a settled conviction or an idea you are still exploring? Can you give an example? Understanding requires willingness to hear information that may change the decision.

A third capacity is recognising the difference between an agreement and a wish. We will manage somehow is not the same as a plan for debts, residence, family support, or childcare. We will never quarrel is not a workable conflict policy. My partner will change after marriage is not evidence of current change. Preparation helps people turn goodwill into specific commitments and identify matters that still require work. It also teaches them to notice when reassurance substitutes for answering a legitimate question.

Education should increase freedom, including freedom to say no. A programme that measures success only by the number of weddings it facilitates risks encouraging participants to suppress concerns. Some couples should proceed with thoughtful preparation. Others should postpone while they address an unresolved issue. Some should end the relationship. These outcomes have different emotional consequences, but each can represent responsible use of what has been learned. The facilitator's role is not to manufacture a predetermined answer.

Finally, preparation should connect people with appropriate support. A couple may identify a concern that exceeds the facilitator's competence. Issues such as persistent problems,

significant health concerns, safety risks, and legal considerations require appropriate assistance. A responsible educator helps participants understand the purpose of referral and choose an accessible next step. Knowing when to involve someone else is part of readiness. It demonstrates that a couple can seek help without treating every difficulty as an embarrassment or a spiritual failure.

Making a defensible case for preparation

In a meta-analysis of 47 studies, Fawcett et al. (2010) found evidence that premarital education improved couple communication, especially in studies that observed couples directly. The analysis found no improvement in relationship quality or satisfaction when unpublished studies were included. Few studies followed couples beyond the early months of marriage, leaving the long-term preventive effects uncertain.

That distinction matters for partners and practitioners. Education can have practical value even when a specific outcome is uncertain. A participant may learn to ask about debt, discuss family boundaries, recognise intimidation, or seek support sooner. Those are meaningful educational goals. Claims that a course prevents homicide, guarantees mental health, or secures a permanent marriage require evidence specific to those claims. Good intentions do not turn a plausible benefit into a demonstrated result.

Programme findings may transfer unevenly across settings. African facilitators should consider how language, household resources, religious and family expectations, and access to local services affect how participants can use the material.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) identifies ways to prevent intimate partner violence at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. For premarital educators, one implication is to connect participants with safeguarding and specialist support. Responsibility for violence remains with the person who commits it.

For the same reason, outcomes should be evaluated carefully. A marriage continuing does not prove that it is safe or satisfying. A relationship ending does not prove that education failed. Participants may learn enough to recognise that proceeding would be unwise. Evaluation can examine whether they understand key issues, can demonstrate a skill, feel able to raise a concern, and know where to seek help. Those measures do not tell the whole story, but they are more useful than counting ceremonies alone.

Ask participants which activities helped, whose circumstances were overlooked and whether they could access the services to which they were referred. Use their feedback to improve the programme.

Different routes into a relationship

An introduction through family, a friendship at work or school, and an online connection give people different opportunities to learn about one another. Chapter 4 explains how to build on each kind of introduction.

An introduction by an uncle or cousin can offer useful context. The introducer may know something about the person's family, work, or reputation. However, that knowledge has limits. They may never have seen the person in an intimate relationship. They may be influenced by social status, financial expectations, or affection for a family. The prospective partners should therefore receive the introduction as an opportunity to learn, rather than as a completed assessment. Gratitude to the introducer does not create an obligation to marry.

School and workplace connections can reveal aspects of reliability, collaboration, and everyday conduct. Yet performance in those settings does not automatically disclose beliefs about marriage. A helpful colleague may expect rigid control within the home. A school buddy may well have grown into his beliefs after he graduated. Experience is important, but it is only the beginning of a discussion. Experience provides answers to some questions but not all. The length of acquaintance does not remove the need to examine future expectations.

Digital relationships introduce another set of questions. A person may communicate frequently and thoughtfully online. Regular conversation can create emotional closeness and offer opportunities for careful disclosure. At the same time, the platform permits selective presentation. Participants should consider what has been verified, which parts of life remain unseen, and whether each person can safely maintain independent support. A public profile or professional title should not be treated as proof of honesty, marital availability, or the quality of private conduct.

Long-distance couples need deliberate opportunities to understand ordinary life. A visit may be enjoyable while revealing little about routines, responsibilities, friendships, or behaviour under inconvenience. Preparation can include specific conversations about money, living arrangements, employment, family expectations, and relocation. Where feasible and safe, spending meaningful time together in ordinary settings can add information. There is no fixed number of visits that certifies readiness. The relevant question is what the couple still does not know and why.

Marriages arranged before partners live together require particular attention to the transition. A person relocating may leave employment, familiar services, friends, and family support. The couple needs clarity about housing, access to

money, documents, work opportunities, and ways to obtain independent advice. Legal recognition of a marriage in absentia varies by jurisdiction and circumstance; qualified local advice is necessary. Educational preparation should not assume that family approval or a completed ceremony resolves practical uncertainty about the life that follows.

Knowing the person you are bringing

Partner choice often begins with a list of desirable qualities in another person. Individuals may seek kindness, faithfulness, ambition, shared convictions, education, stability, or companionship. These preferences matter, but the examination should also turn inward. What does each individual expect a spouse to provide? Which expectations are reasonable, which require discussion, and which may place impossible responsibility on another person? A prospective marriage brings two lives together. Understanding only one of them leaves preparation incomplete.

People may seek marriage for companionship and shared responsibility while also feeling lonely, attracted to someone or anxious about getting older. Consider what you hope marriage will change and which needs also call for your own effort or support from others.

How do I react when corrected? Do I explain, withdraw, attack, apologise, or seek a pause? What happens when I do not get the

answer I want? Do I treat another person's boundary as a legitimate choice or an insult? These questions become more useful when connected to actual examples. A person can describe themselves as calm while avoiding every difficult discussion. Preparation should examine patterns without reducing the individual to a label.

It also includes recognising needs and limits. One person may need regular quiet time; another may value frequent shared activity. Someone may have care responsibilities that will continue after marriage. Another may be managing a health condition or recovering from loss. These realities should be discussed with dignity and appropriate privacy. A need is not automatically a defect. The question is how it affects shared life, what support is available, and whether the partners can make a freely accepted arrangement.

Family history adds context to this work. Individuals can explore what they learned about conflict, money, affection, gender, parenting, and loyalty in their families. A family genogram can help organise relationships and patterns, but it should not become a device for diagnosing absent relatives or condemning a lineage. People inherit influences and resources; they can also develop new practices. The relevant question is how a person understands that history and takes responsibility for their present choices.

Self-awareness should remain compassionate and accountable. Shame can encourage concealment, while uncritical reassurance can discourage change. A useful educational conversation allows someone to identify a difficulty without being reduced to it. It also asks what they are doing about it. I know I become controlling when anxious is a beginning, not a complete solution. Readiness is all about striving for more responsible behaviour, being open to criticism and showing progress instead of just having a valid excuse.

Learning about a prospective partner

A person can ask a relevant question without demanding passwords, secretly searching a device, or threatening exposure. Consent and boundaries remain important during courtship. If a relationship can continue only through intrusive monitoring, the couple should examine that condition seriously rather than present it as an ordinary expression of love.

Start with intentions. Why do you want a relationship at this point in your life? What does marriage mean to you? What do you hope we will share, and what do you expect to retain independently? Some people assume that attraction supplies a common purpose. It does not. One may seek companionship, another may prioritise migration, another may expect care for

relatives, and another may mainly want children. Such goals need to be discussed to avoid becoming silent requirements.

Ask about previous marriages, children, debts and other obligations that could affect shared plans. Where legal history matters, focus on its present implications and use lawful, appropriate ways to verify relevant information. Chapter 5 discusses how to raise these questions while respecting privacy.

Compare what a person says with what they do. If they value equality, how do they respond to disagreement? If they promise financial openness, can they discuss existing debts? Pay attention to repeated evasion, contradictions or disregard for limits and interpret each incident in context.

Independent support becomes important at this stage. Relationships must leave some space for the involvement of friends, relatives, or experts. An insistence that all concerns be kept away from anyone else can limit a person's ability to think clearly or seek help. At the same time, privacy should be respected. A partner's sensitive disclosure is not material for community gossip. Preparation teaches the distinction between confidential consultation for support and indiscriminate sharing that exposes or shames another person.

Knowledge will always remain incomplete. No reasonable process can guarantee full access to another person's motives or future behaviour. The answer is neither blind trust nor

permanent investigation. It is careful learning, honest reflection, appropriate verification, respect for uncertainty, and attention to conduct. Where essential information remains unavailable, postponement may be wiser than inventing reassurance. The willingness to acknowledge what one does not know can protect the quality of the eventual decision.

Recognising gaps before they become grievances

A relational gap is a difference between partners that matters to their shared life. It may concern expectations, interpretations, needs, convictions, habits, or responsibilities. Two people can use the same word while attaching different meanings to it. Respect may mean consultation to one person and obedience to another. Financial support may mean occasional assistance to one partner and an open-ended duty to extended family to the other. Premarital education makes these differences available for examination.

Not every gap is a reason to leave. These differences can be sorted out easily by all individuals by being accommodating to each other. But there are some other differences that transcend these suggested areas of life.

Areas of residence, bearing of children, religion, work, and taking care of existing children may need to be discussed explicitly. A gap becomes especially serious when one person assumes that marriage will remove the other's right to disagree.

Compatibility includes the way difference is handled, not merely the amount of similarity.

Consider another fictional couple, Amina and Joel. Amina will keep on working even after she gets married and will continue being part of her mother's caregiving process. However, Joel expects his wife to quit working immediately and is under the impression that any assistance to family members requires his approval. They need to look into both the real-world implications and deeper meaning of this situation. Is she open to joint planning while retaining agency? The answer cannot be reached by saying that love will resolve everything.

A workable agreement needs more than reluctant compliance. Both people should be able to explain what they have accepted, why it is workable, and what will happen if circumstances change. If one person agrees only because they fear humiliation or losing the relationship, the apparent settlement may conceal an unresolved problem. Facilitators should create room for each partner to speak privately when appropriate. They should not interpret silence as consent or treat the more confident person's account as the shared position.

Some differences reveal incompatible essential plans. If one person is firmly committed to having children and the other is firmly committed not to, neither should enter marriage expecting to convert the other later. Both deserve dignity. They may need

time and independent reflection to establish whether their positions are settled. If they remain incompatible, ending the relationship may prevent an enduring struggle over a decision with profound consequences. The conclusion concerns the partnership, not the worth of either person.

Unsafe conduct belongs in a different category from an ordinary preference gap. Threats, intimidation, forced sexual activity, stalking, and restrictions that remove freedom cannot be negotiated as though each partner simply has a different style. The World Health Organization (2014) prioritises appropriate support for people subjected to partner violence; its clinical handbook advises against offering couple counselling in that context. Educational facilitators should arrange private, competent assessment and appropriate assistance rather than automatically bring partners together to resolve the disclosure.

The pressures that make reconsideration difficult

A couple may identify a concern and still feel unable to change course. Money has been spent. Families have been informed. Guests have made plans. A pastor has announced the wedding. One partner may have resigned from work or begun preparing to relocate. These circumstances create real burdens. A thoughtful response acknowledges them while refusing to treat them as proof that marriage is the right decision. A lack of convenience and relational readiness are two separate issues.

It may be particularly influential when marriage is connected to maturity or spirituality in adulthood. A single person may feel watched or judged. A parent may fear embarrassment if an engagement ends. An introducer may feel that their reputation is at stake. These pressures should be brought into the conversation because they can distort consent. A person should be able to say, I appreciate your support, but I need more time, without facing threats or public shaming.

Language used spiritually may have an effect on the decision too. It may be about a dream, vision, belief or divine guidance. The role of the pastor is to understand the situation based on his own theological perspective, taking into account that there is room for criticism and choice. Nothing must deprive a person of his right to make decisions or provide an excuse for deceit and mischief. Praying and thoughtful learning can go together. There is no justification for ignoring any questions on account of this.

Financial security and migration are equally important to consider. The relationship may provide all these things along with love. But this too needs to be openly discussed. What happens if employment is delayed or a visa is refused? What resources can each person access independently? Does either feel compelled to accept conditions they would otherwise reject? Preparation should take into account vulnerability without

assuming that those in difficult circumstances are incapable of rational deliberation.

Age-related issues may limit one's perception of choices. An individual feels that there is no chance of postponing the decision due to the desire to have children, fear of being alone forever or loss of opportunities. Such feelings should be respected but cannot serve as an excuse to ignore lies or threats. In cases when it is important to know about health or fertility, expert consultation can help identify the facts. Urgency should not deprive a person of the right to have all information and support in order to make a decision.

Those who have parental or leader positions can alleviate this problem by publicly acknowledging the right to rethink the situation. It includes reconsidering a ruined marriage as an ordinary occurrence, keeping the issue confidential, helping with preparations and maintaining secrecy. The person who made a decision about a break does not need to share all the details. Support may involve helping them manage disappointed expectations while preserving dignity. Creating this freedom in advance makes the educational process more credible when difficult information emerges.

Guiding without taking over

A pastor, counsellor, or parent may have knowledge that helps a couple notice an overlooked issue. They can ask questions,

provide information, teach skills, and connect participants with services. Their influence becomes problematic when they assume ownership of the choice. Obedience to leadership does not mean the individual should marry someone else. Confidence from the facilitator does not remove the uncertainty. Guidance is most beneficial where it enhances the ability of the participants to reason and make decisions.

There must be recognition of power. The individual may feel constrained to challenge an esteemed pastor or influential parent. A woman may fear that raising a concern will be interpreted as disrespect. A younger person may feel unable to reject an introduction organised by elders. The facilitator should explicitly make room for disagreement and avoid public pressure. Private educational conversations can help participants express uncertainty, but privacy arrangements and the limits of confidentiality should be explained before sensitive information is collected.

Competence is also important. Pastoral experience may prove useful when dealing with people spiritually and relationally, but that alone does not provide competence when it comes to diagnosing a condition, conducting a clinical risk assessment, or understanding a legal document.

Counsellors likewise need to work within their training and authorisation. A referral is not an admission that the educator has

failed. It is a practical recognition that the concern requires different expertise and that participants deserve appropriate assistance.

A preparation programme should explain what information will be recorded, who may access it, and how it will be protected. Participants should understand the purpose of questionnaires and conversations. Sensitive disclosures should not be circulated among church committees or relatives merely because a wedding is being planned. The facilitator needs to understand all duties and explain the issues of confidentiality appropriately. In case there is an urgent matter, the facilitator should adhere to the relevant safeguarding policy instead of trying to improvise.

The parents can assist in passing down values and experiences without being constrained by past experiences. The parents may identify a practical problem or help out with accommodation and employment. They should also listen to the adult child's account and recognise the limits of their own information. A partner's ethnicity, disability, modest income, or difficult family background does not establish poor character. Guidance should focus on relevant conduct, responsibilities, compatibility, and consent rather than inherited status or community prejudice.

For all helpers, the central discipline is to ask what serves the people making the decision. An impressive ceremony may benefit the institution's reputation. A preferred match may please

the family. A successful introduction may flatter the introducer. Those interests must not govern the process. If the couple needs time, guidance should make that time usable. If a person is unsafe, support should prioritise their needs. If they proceed, education should help them prepare for ordinary life together.

Turning reflection into an educational practice

Begin with individual reflection before asking partners to compare answers. Each person can write why they want marriage, what they hope to contribute, and what they consider essential in shared life. They can identify expectations concerning money, family, faith, work, sexuality, children, and residence. Writing independently helps reveal assumptions that might otherwise be shaped by the more vocal partner. The exercise is for understanding, not for awarding a compatibility score or deciding who has the correct personality.

Next, choose one manageable conversation. Residence is often a useful starting point because it links employment, family relationships, finances, and support. Each person should explain their preference and its meaning. The other should summarise what they heard before responding. The pair can then distinguish areas of agreement from questions still open. If the discussion becomes intimidating or unsafe, stop the joint exercise and seek suitable support. Completion of the activity matters less than the conditions under which it occurs.

Create a simple record of unresolved matters. For each one, identify what information is missing, whose expertise may help, what action is needed, and when the couple will review it. For instance, an inquiry on debt would necessitate an explanation of balance and repayment. A health concern may require a consultation. A relocation issue may require employment information or qualified legal advice. A record turns vague anxiety into a practical next step without forcing an immediate conclusion.

Practise a pause statement. A partner might say, I care about this relationship, and I am not ready to confirm the wedding date until we understand this issue. These words have to match the individual's language and situation. The reaction from the partner provides valuable information. They might be disappointed but will respect the request. If the response involves threats, punishment, or pressure, the concern has become larger than the original topic. Preparation must include the freedom to slow down.

Identify a support route in advance. Each participant should know at least one trusted person or suitable service they can consult confidentially. The choice should be accessible, competent, and independent enough to hear concerns honestly. Some partners may have limited access to specialists. Facilitators can help map realistic local options rather than

provide a list that cannot be used. Access includes cost, transport, language, privacy, and the participant's ability to contact the service safely.

Finally, review what has changed. What do I understand now that I had assumed before? Which agreement has become clearer? What remains unresolved? What behaviour would show progress? Which decision can I freely make at this stage? The review should not demand certainty about every future event. It should establish whether the present decision is informed enough, whether essential concerns have been addressed, and whether both people remain free to proceed or reconsider.

Choosing while there is still room to choose

The wartime account brings us back to timing. Asking questions early gives people more room to act on what they learn. Help remains important whenever difficulties emerge.

For a single reader, the practical invitation is to begin learning before there is pressure to announce a match. For a couple, it is to ask what they know, what they have assumed, and what they still need to discuss. For parents, it is to support thoughtful choice without making acceptance of an introduction compulsory. For pastors and counsellors, it is to provide education that can produce an honest decision rather than merely a completed wedding requirement.

Proceeding, pausing, and ending should each be considered with care. Proceeding requires freely accepted commitment and enough understanding of the proposed life. Pausing requires a purpose, concrete work, and a reasonable review point. Ending requires dignity and, where there is risk, suitable safety support. None should be reduced to a public verdict on someone's worth. A partnership can be unsuitable even when both people possess admirable qualities. Respectful recognition of that fact can spare further conflict.

The chapters that follow examine the people, histories, conversations, differences, and practical responsibilities involved in this decision. They will ask partners to take affection seriously while also taking information and conduct seriously. Marriage is a significant commitment to another human being, with effects extending into families and communities. It deserves a preparation process in which questions can be asked honestly and answers can influence the outcome. That process begins with giving people room to understand before they commit.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What do I already know about the marriage I hope to enter, and what have I only assumed? Which question have I avoided because I fear the answer? Am I able to request more time without punishment or humiliation? What am I asking a future

spouse to provide that I should also address through personal growth or other support? How would I distinguish a manageable difference from an essential incompatibility or a safety concern? For facilitators, consider these additional questions. Does our preparation programme begin early enough to influence choice? Can participants disagree with us? How do we protect a person who raises a private concern? Are our claims about programme benefits supported by evidence? What happens when a couple decides not to marry? Which local services can we actually access when a referral is needed? How will we know that participants have learned something useful beyond attending the sessions?

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Chapter 2

Knowing Yourself Before Choosing a Partner

The person who will enter the marriage

When people describe the partners they hope to marry, they often begin with the other person's qualities. They want someone faithful, responsible, affectionate, educated, spiritually grounded, or financially stable. Some hope for a person whose family will welcome them. Others prioritise someone who can share their ambitions or understand their difficulties. These are certainly things worth pondering over. However, partner selection is another thing that must be considered: who am I selecting as my partner, and what do I hope marriage will give me?

To be self-aware means to acquire an accurate understanding of one's experiences, needs, beliefs, feelings, tendencies, abilities, shortcomings, and obligations. Self-awareness involves becoming aware of how each of these affects one's behaviour towards others.

It does not require perfect insight or a life without difficulties. Nor does it mean that a partner must earn the right to be loved by becoming flawless. It means taking responsibility for

learning about oneself rather than placing every question about readiness on the prospective spouse.

Imagine that a woman says she wants an honest husband while finding it difficult to disclose her debts. Imagine that a man seeks a respectful wife while treating disagreement as disobedience. Each may sincerely value the quality they request. Nevertheless, the expectation needs to be examined alongside their own conduct. Preparation asks how honesty and respect will operate in both directions. A relationship cannot be adequately understood through a list of demands addressed to one partner.

In contemporary African settings, identity can be expressed through several overlapping relationships. Someone may understand themselves as a daughter, son, believer, professional, caregiver, community member, or eldest sibling. Marriage will enter that existing network of belonging and obligation. It does not make the earlier life disappear. Individuals should therefore identify what they already carry, what they can realistically share, and what they intend to renegotiate. A partner should encounter an understandable account of these responsibilities rather than discover them only after the ceremony.

The purpose of this chapter is to help partners begin that account. We will examine motives, personal worth, needs, convictions, emotional responses, physical realities, habits, and support. We will also consider how self-knowledge becomes visible through

conduct. Pastors, counsellors, and parents can use these discussions educationally, while respecting the limits of their roles. The case examples are fictional. They illustrate questions for reflection and do not provide a basis for diagnosing participants or deciding their suitability through a score.

Why do I want marriage now

The question why do I want marriage can appear unnecessary to someone who has always imagined marrying. They may answer that marriage is natural, that their faith values it, or that they have reached the expected age. Those answers can describe important beliefs, but they may leave personal motivations unexplored. A more revealing question is why this commitment matters to me at this point, with this person, under these conditions. The answer may differ from the reasons given to relatives or church members.

People can have several motives at once. They may value companionship and also feel tired of loneliness. They may want children and also hope to escape an uncomfortable home. They may love their partner and feel anxious about financial uncertainty. Mixed motives deserve examination without immediate condemnation. A useful exercise is to separate the hoped-for benefits from the responsibilities one is willing to accept. What do I expect to receive, and what shared obligations am I genuinely prepared to undertake?

Consider a fictional reader, Tunde, whose relatives repeatedly ask when he will marry. He begins to view every family gathering as an examination of his adulthood. When an aunt introduces someone, he feels relief before learning much about her. His interest may develop into affection, but the original pressure still needs attention. If the family stopped asking for six months, would he still choose this relationship? What qualities in this particular person support his decision beyond the opportunity to end an uncomfortable conversation?

Another reader, Grace, hopes marriage will provide stability after several years of insecure work. Economic security is a legitimate concern. However, she should ask whether the proposed arrangement preserves her dignity, access to resources, and capacity to make decisions. What happens if the partner loses employment? Will she be able to pursue work or training? Does she feel obliged to overlook conduct that troubles her because the alternative appears financially difficult? These questions clarify the conditions of the choice without shaming hardship.

A pastor or parent can help by listening for both aspiration and pressure. They should avoid interpreting every hesitation as immaturity or every desire for security as selfishness. The educational task is to help the person describe their motives honestly and consider their implications. A marriage chosen

mainly to silence relatives may carry different expectations from one chosen through sustained knowledge of a partner. Naming that difference creates room to address the pressure before it becomes the organising reason for commitment.

Personal worth and the need to be chosen

There is a difference between wanting a loving relationship and believing that one's value depends on securing it. An individual may feel that marriage will finally prove they are desirable, respectable, successful, or spiritually acceptable. Such a hope can make rejection especially painful and reconsideration especially difficult. If the relationship becomes the main evidence of personal worth, every concern may feel like a threat to identity. The person may then defend the engagement even when important questions remain unanswered.

Personal worth should not be measured by marital status. A person can desire marriage strongly while recognising dignity in their present life. Parents and church officials could help foster this idea through the manner in which they speak. Casual jokes of being left behind, being unwanted, and being less than whole can make participants feel even more pressured. The community could celebrate marriages but also recognise the value of single individuals, widowed persons, divorcees, and those who have decided against marriage.

In the GAP Marriage Counselling Theory, a person's history and sense of self can influence whether they read a difference as a threat to dignity, identity or the relationship (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 5). Ask yourself what you believe a disagreement says about you. A partner's hesitation, for instance, might feel like rejection before you know why they hesitated.

For example, Sifa asks her partner to reconsider an expensive celebration. He hears her concern as a declaration that he cannot provide adequately. She intended to discuss the budget; he experienced a challenge to his standing. His feelings deserve recognition, yet the interpretation still needs examination. What exactly did she say? What evidence supports his conclusion? Can they discuss expenditure without making either person's dignity dependent on agreement? The meaning attached to the conversation has become as important as its financial subject.

Self-respect also includes the ability to tolerate an unsuitable match ending. The grief may be substantial. A person may need support to manage disappointed hopes, public expectations, and practical losses. However, incompatibility is not a verdict that they are unworthy of love. Nor does being selected by a highly admired person prove that the relationship is sound. Individuals should ask whether they can evaluate the partnership on its actual conditions rather than on the status they believe it confers.

Understanding needs without turning them into demands

Individuals often use the word need for several different things: affection, safety, money, attention, agreement, a particular lifestyle, or a preferred way of communicating. Clarifying the term improves conversation. Some conditions concern basic dignity and freedom from harm. Others concern emotional support or practical arrangements. Still others are preferences about how support should be expressed. Treating all of them as interchangeable can create confusion. A partner may agree that connection matters while disagreeing that constant messaging is necessary to demonstrate it.

Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence and relatedness as basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy means acting with a sense of choice. A person can freely embrace responsibilities to relatives and still need room to think and decide. Ask how the proposed marriage would support each person's agency, skills and connection to others.

Consider the difference between saying I need reassurance and saying you must surrender all your passwords. The first identifies an experience requiring discussion. The second specifies a controlling response that may infringe privacy. A couple can explore reassurance through dependable communication, truthful conduct, and agreed expectations

without accepting unrestricted monitoring. Similarly, a need for companionship does not require a partner to abandon every friendship. Education should help participants find ways of expressing needs that also respect the other person's personhood. Personal needs should be discussed alongside resources beyond the couple. Friends, family, faith communities, mentors, professional services, meaningful work, and personal practices may all contribute support. No prospective spouse can meet every emotional, social, financial, and spiritual need at all times. This does not diminish the value of marital support. It makes the responsibility more realistic. Individuals can ask which needs reasonably belong in the partnership, which can be supported elsewhere, and which require personal or specialist work.

An educational exercise is to describe a need in three parts. First, name the experience: I feel disconnected when our plans change without explanation. Second, identify a reasonable request: please tell me when a plan changes and when we can speak. Third, allow discussion: what arrangement is realistic for both of us? This activity encourages clarity without demanding immediate agreement. It also reveals whether a partner can hear a request respectfully. A need becomes easier to discuss when it is connected to concrete conduct.

Values that can be seen in ordinary decisions

A person may say that faith, honesty, family, respect, education, or service is important. These statements provide a starting point. Preparation asks how the value influences actual choices. If family is important, which relatives carry responsibilities, and what support is expected? If honesty matters, how does the person respond when truth has an inconvenient consequence? If respect is central, can a less powerful person disagree without punishment? Values become clearer through examples than through admirable labels alone.

Some values are essential convictions; others are preferences that can be adjusted. Individuals should distinguish the two before seeking a partner. A firm intention about having children, an enduring religious commitment, or an obligation to an existing child may carry different significance from a preference about where to spend a holiday. The distinction should not be made only when a disagreement occurs. A person who has reflected beforehand can explain the issue more accurately and listen to the partner's position with less confusion.

Contemporary life can produce competing commitments. One person could be career-orientated yet at the same time be eager for active participation in family affairs. Another individual could desire to help his or her parents and at the same time establish himself/herself financially. These tensions do not

automatically indicate hypocrisy. They call for realistic planning. What priority applies under present circumstances? What sacrifice is feasible? Which commitment belongs to me, and which am I assuming a spouse will carry? A shared future should not be built on resources that have already been promised elsewhere.

Religious partners can explore the connection between their public religious identity and personal actions. James 1:19 provides an excellent point of discussion about listening and anger, while Philippians 2:4 talks about looking at the interests of others. A person should not use spiritual language to exempt themselves from accountability. For partners from other traditions, equivalent reflection can centre on their own convictions while retaining respect for consent and dignity.

To test clarity, choose one recent decision involving inconvenience. Describe what happened, what alternatives were available, what you chose, and who was affected. Which value did your conduct express? Was there a difference between your stated belief and your action? What would you do differently? This exercise is more useful than asking whether someone is a good person in the abstract. It invites honest examination of a particular choice and identifies a practice that can be strengthened.

Learning from attachment experiences without becoming a label

People learn expectations about closeness through relationships. They may have experienced dependable care, affection, rejection, loss, inconsistency, or fear. Some become watchful when a partner is unavailable. Others feel uncomfortable asking for support or receiving it. These experiences can provide context for current reactions. An individual may recognise that a delayed reply carries a meaning formed long before the present courtship. Recognition can create an opportunity to clarify the present situation instead of automatically treating an earlier fear as current evidence.

However, an educational conversation should not assign a fixed attachment category through a few questions. Popular labels can appear explanatory while oversimplifying a person's life. Someone who prefers time alone is not necessarily unable to connect. A person who seeks clarification is not necessarily excessively dependent. Responses may vary across relationships and circumstances. Facilitators should ask about experiences, meanings, and behaviour rather than use a label as a verdict about personality or marital suitability.

The relevant questions are concrete. When I feel uncertain about connection, what do I do? Can I ask for reassurance directly? Do I repeatedly test the partner, threaten to leave, or withdraw

without explanation? Can I accept a reasonable limit on availability? What helps me regain perspective? A partner can answer these questions through recent examples without making a clinical claim. Where distress is persistent or difficult to manage, a qualified professional may help the person explore it more fully.

Understanding history must not become an excuse for present harm. Past betrayal may cause fear, but it cannot justify stalking or controlling someone. Compassion can coexist with a clear expectation of safer conduct. The prospective partner can care without accepting responsibility for proving trustworthiness through unlimited submission. Readiness involves the ability to recognise one's reactions and work on them while respecting the other person's freedom.

Parents and pastors should also avoid treating a difficult childhood as destiny. Some individuals develop considerable reflection, resilience, and relational skill despite painful histories. Others with outwardly comfortable backgrounds may struggle with accountability. The quality of present conduct, willingness to learn, and use of support matter. Chapter 3 will examine family history more systematically. Here, the invitation is to identify experiences that influence one's expectations and decide how to engage them responsibly in the proposed partnership.

Knowing emotions and choosing responses

Emotions can draw attention to something significant. Fear may signal uncertainty or danger; sadness may reflect loss; anger may arise around perceived injustice or frustration. Yet an emotion does not, by itself, establish the accuracy of every conclusion attached to it. Feeling abandoned does not prove abandonment. Feeling disrespected does not prove that another person intended contempt. Preparation helps partners separate the experience, the interpretation, and the response long enough to consider what the available information actually supports.

Gross (1998) describes emotion regulation as involving how people influence their emotions, including their experience and expression. For this chapter, the practical concern is how a partner notices an emerging reaction and chooses conduct that preserves room for thought. Regulation does not mean concealing all emotion or agreeing to unfair treatment. Nor should calmness be demanded from a person in danger. It means developing options for responding to ordinary distress while retaining access to support when a situation exceeds those options.

Begin by noticing early signs. Does the voice rise? Do thoughts become absolute? Does the person rehearse accusations, stop listening, or feel an urge to send many messages? These observations can identify a useful point for slowing the

conversation. A partner might say, I am becoming too upset to discuss this constructively; I would like a short pause and to return to it this evening. In an ordinary, safe disagreement, a clear return plan helps distinguish a pause from indefinite avoidance.

After the pause, examine the interpretation. What happened that anyone present could observe? What meaning did I assign? What else might explain the event? What information do I need? Suppose a partner ended a call abruptly. The individual may interpret rejection, while the partner may have faced an interruption at work. Clarification matters. At the same time, repeated dismissive conduct should not be explained away automatically. Reflection should improve judgement, not force a reassuring account regardless of the evidence.

Practise accountability after an unhelpful response. An apology should identify the conduct and its effect rather than make the partner responsible for it. I raised my voice and insulted you; that was wrong; I need to address how I respond is clearer than you made me angry. The couple can then consider what change will be visible. Self-awareness becomes useful when it alters behaviour. A sophisticated explanation without safer conduct leaves the partner carrying the consequences of the same pattern.

The body and the daily conditions of readiness

Self-awareness includes the body one lives in. Energy, sleep, pain, disability, ongoing illness, medication routines, sexual concerns, and care needs may affect daily life. Individuals should be able to consider these matters without treating a person as defective. A health condition does not determine whether someone can form a meaningful partnership. The educational question is what relevant information, practical arrangements, and qualified guidance will help the individuals make an informed and respectful decision.

In Preventive Life Design, identity, life decisions, environmental circumstances, lifestyle habits, and social systems are presented as interacting domains through which people can reflect on long-term wellbeing (Adetunji, 2026b, Chapter 2). Applied here, this perspective encourages attention to the life a couple is organising, including rest, work, housing, and obligations. It is a planning framework rather than a guarantee against illness. Individuals should recognise that resources and structural constraints affect what changes are realistically available.

For example, a person working irregular shifts may struggle to maintain predictable contact. Before interpreting this entirely as a problem of affection, the couple should understand the actual schedule and its demands. What time can reasonably be

protected? What happens when one is exhausted? Is the arrangement temporary or likely to continue? A practical conversation can reveal opportunities for adjustment. It can also identify a mismatch between the life someone expects and the conditions their partner currently faces.

Health disclosure should be purposeful and consensual. A partner may need to know information that materially affects shared decisions, care responsibilities, or sexual and reproductive health. However, public exposure and coercive testing do not create sound preparation. Qualified health professionals can help people understand relevant options and uncertainty. A pastor should not interpret laboratory results beyond competence or declare a person unsuitable based on a diagnosis. Questions about treatment should be taken to an appropriate professional, including before any medication changes.

Individuals can make a practical account of present functioning. What demands most of my energy? What care or accommodation do I use? Which routines help? What information would a future spouse reasonably need to discuss with me? What am I still seeking help to understand? The purpose is neither exhaustive confession nor selective concealment. It is an honest conversation about the realities of

shared life, supported by competent advice where needed and respectful of the dignity of both participants.

Daily habits and evidence of change

Courtship often highlights special occasions. Married life brings daily routines into view, from spending and sleep to household work and keeping appointments. Which of your habits would affect a future spouse, and how?

If you promise to change a habit, identify one action you can take and a way to review it. Someone who wants to manage money better might start by recording spending. Someone who withdraws during disagreement might practise requesting a pause and returning at the agreed time.

For instance, Kwame often takes loans from his peers and fails to repay them promptly. He considers himself generous since he pays for parties most of the time. His partner should understand the pattern, and he should examine it himself. Does generosity require spending money already owed to someone else? What records does he keep? What repayment plan is feasible? The issue is not simply whether his intentions are warm. It concerns how his choices distribute benefits and burdens among other people.

Habits can seem ordinary when they are common among friends or relatives. Ask how lateness, shouting, secrecy or heavy

spending would affect a shared household. If a pattern is harmful or you are concerned about dependence on alcohol or another substance, seek qualified support before relying on a promise of change.

Choose one habit to work on before finalising wedding plans. Describe what you will do differently, when you will do it and how you will review progress. “I will record my purchases and review them each week” gives you something specific to follow up.

Boundaries and the freedom to remain a person

A boundary describes a limit on your participation. It can concern time, money, privacy or physical contact. You may decline a loan, ask to stop a conversation or say you do not want to be touched. Discuss how each of you handles such limits, including when you feel disappointed.

Boundaries are not commands for controlling someone else. I will not remain in a conversation where I am being insulted concerns one's participation. You may never disagree with me imposes a restriction on the other person's agency. The distinction matters because controlling behaviour is sometimes described as protecting the relationship. Individuals should ask whether a proposed limit safeguards dignity or requires another person to surrender ordinary freedom. The word boundary does not make every demand reasonable.

The concept of consent needs to be viewed in relation to ongoing conditions rather than something that comes through participation, approval from the family, giving gifts, or even planned marriage. Individuals always have a choice regarding how to proceed with physical intimacy, including whether to take their time or to end the relationship. Preparation should make these freedoms discussable. A couple learns something important from how each responds to a respectful no, particularly when the refusal affects something they strongly want.

In fictional courtship discussions, facilitators can ask participants to practise declining a request. One might say, I am not comfortable lending that amount, but I can discuss another way to help. The listener should acknowledge the answer without punishment or repeated pressure. This is an educational exercise, not a test proving safety. If actual threats or coercion are present, the facilitator should not use joint practice to resolve them. Private assessment and suitable support become the priority.

Self-awareness also includes recognising where one finds boundary-setting difficult. An individual may fear disappointing parents, losing affection, or appearing selfish. They can examine those fears and practise clearer language with appropriate support. A partner who respects agency can help make

conversation easier, but should not become the sole source of permission. The person needs a growing ability to make and communicate choices in several relationships. That capacity will matter when marriage introduces new demands and competing loyalties.

Support and responsibilities beyond the couple

A prospective spouse enters a life already connected to others. A partner may support a parent, contribute to a sibling's education, care for a child, belong to a religious community, or maintain close friendships. Self-awareness includes identifying these relationships and the responsibilities attached to them. The issue is not whether extended relationships should disappear. It is whether their place in the proposed marriage can be understood and discussed without surprising either person later. Create an account of current obligations. Which are fixed, which are occasional, and which are hopes rather than commitments? What money, time, transport, or care is involved? Who else contributes? Is a responsibility likely to increase? A partner who says my family depends on me may be describing something substantial, but the statement needs detail. A prospective partner should not have to infer the scale of responsibility from a general claim of loyalty.

Support is equally important. Who can help when the individual is distressed, ill, unemployed, or uncertain? Which relationships

provide reliable assistance, and which mainly create pressure? A community can offer belonging while still being difficult to consult about a private concern. Individuals can identify different people for different needs. A trustworthy friend listens, a mentor provides advice on work, while an experienced professional attends to a special problem. We should view the accessibility of support realistically.

Partners need to discuss their friends without thinking that all independent friendships lead to betrayal. Relevant questions concern boundaries, honesty, competing responsibilities, and conduct. If a friendship repeatedly involves concealed spending or contempt for the relationship, the specific concern deserves attention. If the only concern is that the partner has independent support, the demand for isolation should be examined. A sound partnership can develop closeness while retaining appropriate connections beyond itself.

Facilitators can help individuals prepare a simple relationship map. Place the individual at the centre and note important people and services around them. Indicate what each connection contributes and what responsibilities it carries. Keep the exercise private unless the participant freely chooses to share it. The map is not a diagnosis of the family. It provides a starting point for understanding the social conditions of marriage and will connect with the fuller genogram work in the next chapter.

Distinguishing reflection from self-accusation

Self-examination can become harsh when individuals believe that every painful relationship reveals a personal defect. Someone who was deceived may conclude that they were foolish. A person who experienced abuse may be told that better preparation would have prevented it. These conclusions can misplace responsibility and discourage help-seeking. Learning from experience should not require accepting blame for another person's deliberate conduct. Reflection should identify what can now be understood without rewriting harm as something the victim deserved.

The opposite difficulty is avoiding all responsibility because the circumstances were painful. A partner may have experienced rejection and also responded by insulting others. Both realities can be acknowledged. They can receive support for the hurt and take responsibility for their response. The point is to be precise about ownership. What belongs to my choices? What belongs to another person's behaviour? What arose from circumstances neither of us controlled? This precision makes change more achievable than sweeping blame.

individuals should not confuse an ordinary limitation with a reason to reject themselves. Shyness, disability, modest income, previous bereavement, or a need for emotional support does not eliminate the possibility of meaningful partnership. The relevant

questions concern honesty, practical capacity, mutual acceptance, compatibility, and access to needed resources. Someone may need additional support before making a decision, but the support should enhance agency rather than establish a permanent judgement about their worth.

In some cases, reflection brings distress that is difficult to manage. Participants should be able to stop an exercise, decline disclosure, and obtain suitable support. A group course should not require detailed accounts of traumatic experiences as proof of participation. Pastors and educators should recognise the limits of the setting. Confidential, qualified help may offer a more appropriate opportunity to explore painful material than a class, a family gathering, or a joint meeting with a prospective spouse.

Compassionate accountability asks what a person needs and what they will do next. If they recognise difficulty expressing needs, they can practise one clear request. If they identify an unresolved practical responsibility, they can gather information. If they notice persistent distress, they can seek an appropriate consultation. The work becomes useful when it leads to a proportionate action. Endless self-criticism may feel serious while leaving the original difficulty unchanged.

Translating self-awareness into a premarital conversation

Self-knowledge should be communicated thoughtfully. A disclosure does not require a person to share everything he remembers from his past or an entire autobiography when meeting someone new. The process of disclosure will depend on the significance of the relationship, the relevance of the past information, and consent. It should be done to provide a truthful report that a potential mate can understand. Withholding a material responsibility while inviting a binding commitment raises a different concern from choosing not to share an irrelevant private detail.

A useful conversation can begin with present realities. These are the responsibilities I already carry. These are the plans I am seriously considering. This is what I find difficult in disagreement, and this is what I am doing about it. These are the convictions I cannot promise to abandon. The partner should have similar space. Neither should be expected to supply an immediate approving response. Information sometimes requires time to understand before a decision about compatibility can be made.

Apply the GAP sequence to a recent example (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 5). If a delayed reply makes one person fear rejection,

they can explain that reaction and ask what happened. The other can describe when they are realistically available.

Honesty also includes admitting uncertainty. I do not yet know whether I can relocate next year is more useful than agreeing vaguely while privately planning to remain. I need advice about this health concern is more responsible than inventing a reassuring explanation. The couple can decide what information is needed and when to return to the question. A person who can acknowledge a limit gives the partner an opportunity to decide with clearer knowledge.

Observe the response to a relevant disclosure. Is it heard respectfully? Does the partner ask reasonable questions? Are they given time to consider? Does either use sensitive information to shame or control the other? A thoughtful response does not always mean agreement. Someone may recognise that they cannot freely accept a proposed responsibility. That conclusion should be expressed with dignity. The purpose of disclosure is informed choice, not securing approval at any cost.

Developing a personal account of readiness

Bring the chapter together through a written account of the person you are bringing into marriage. This is a reflective activity, not an assessment instrument. Begin with your motives and hopes. Explain why the particular relationship matters, what you hope to contribute, and which expectations you need to

examine further. If you are not currently in a relationship, describe the kind of shared life you would consider and the personal work you can begin now.

Next, describe your responsibilities, convictions, and practical circumstances. Include relevant obligations to children and relatives, employment plans, financial realities, health-related considerations, and sources of support. You do not need to distribute the account publicly. Its purpose is to help you recognise what should eventually be discussed with a serious prospective partner. Identify which information requires verification or qualified advice rather than trying to settle every question through reflection alone.

Then select one recent disagreement and examine it carefully. Write what happened, what you believed it meant, what you felt, and how you responded. What effect did your conduct have? Which part can you take responsibility for? What could you practise next time? Avoid diagnosing the other person. If the incident involved threats or coercion, do not use the exercise to rationalise them. Identify suitable support and consider safety separately from ordinary communication practice.

Conclude with a small plan. Choose two or three feasible actions with a review date. You might clarify a debt, practise expressing a limit, discuss a current care responsibility, or arrange a professional consultation. Name what progress would look like.

The plan should be demanding enough to matter and limited enough to carry out. Readiness grows through learning and observable conduct, not through writing increasingly impressive promises.

Self-awareness remains unfinished throughout life. Marriage will bring experiences that neither partner can fully anticipate. The goal before commitment is therefore sufficient honesty, practical understanding, willingness to learn, and freedom to decide. individuals should be able to say more clearly who they are, what they carry, what they need, and what they can offer. With that foundation, the next chapter turns to the families and wider relationship systems that have helped shape the person entering the marriage.

Questions for individual reflection

Why do I want marriage now, and why with this particular person? Which expectation have I placed on marriage that may require another form of support? What happens to my sense of worth when someone disagrees with me? Which responsibilities should a serious prospective spouse know about? What habit am I willing to change, and what evidence would demonstrate progress? Can I receive a respectful no without retaliation?

Educational activity for pastors, counsellors and parents

Invite participants to write privately about one motive, one responsibility, one personal strength, and one area for growth. Allow them to choose what to share. Use a fictional disagreement to practise distinguishing an event, an interpretation, a feeling, and a response. Do not assign diagnoses, compatibility scores, or fixed attachment categories. End with one feasible action and a review date. Make appropriate support available for participants who identify concerns beyond the educational setting.

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Chapter 3

Understanding Family History and the Wider Relationship System

The family that arrives with the individual

Two people may stand alone at the centre of a wedding photograph, but they do not enter marriage without histories. They bring relationships, memories, obligations, loyalties, losses, beliefs, and familiar ways of living. Some of these influences are easily named. Others are so ordinary to the person that they remain unnoticed until a partner expects something different. Premarital education needs to make room for both. Understanding the proposed marriage requires attention to the wider relationships within which each individual has lived.

In many African communities, an account of family extends beyond parents and children. A grandmother may have provided daily care. An aunt may have paid school fees. An older sibling may have acted as a parent. A neighbour, church member, or family friend may have offered a stable home during a difficult period. Biological relationships matter, but they do not explain every important influence. The educational question is who shaped this person's experience of belonging, responsibility, authority, care, and conflict.

This chapter examines family history as information for thoughtful preparation. It introduces a practical approach to family mapping and discusses how partners can use what they learn. It also considers extended-family involvement, financial obligations, losses, migration, faith, and social support. The aim is to help individuals understand the person they are considering and the responsibilities that may accompany the relationship. It is not to inspect a family for defects or certify one lineage as more marriageable than another.

That distinction is essential. A person should not be rejected merely because parents separated, a relative experienced mental illness, the family has limited income, or earlier generations faced conflict. Equally, a respected family name does not establish the honesty or safety of a prospective spouse. Family information provides context. Present conduct, freely accepted responsibilities, compatibility, and the ability to seek appropriate support remain central to the decision. Education must protect individual dignity while encouraging realistic understanding.

The preceding chapter asked who the individual is bringing into marriage. We now ask how that person became familiar with certain expectations and how those expectations operate today. individuals will encounter fictional cases, practical questions, and a family-mapping activity. Participants should control what

they disclose and be able to pause. Sensitive health, legal, and safeguarding matters require suitable professional guidance. A classroom or church course should not become an informal investigation of relatives who are absent and unable to respond.

Learning the rules that were never written

Families often communicate rules without writing them down. Children may learn who speaks first, whose anger is tolerated, how money is discussed, and whether disagreement is welcome. They may observe that adults apologise openly, that difficult matters are avoided, or that one person makes every important decision. They may also learn generosity, persistence, humour, hospitality, and mutual care. Premarital reflection should examine this wider inheritance, including resources that individuals may wish to carry forward.

A useful starting question is what happened in your household when someone made a mistake. Was the response explanation, ridicule, punishment, silence, or help to put things right? Another is how people expressed affection. Was care communicated through words, physical warmth, food, financial provision, practical service, or shared time? These questions invite description rather than a quick verdict about whether the family was good or bad. A household can contain loving practices alongside habits that deserve reconsideration.

Two partners may both describe their families as close and mean different things. For one, closeness involved daily calls, frequent visits, and consultation about most decisions. For the other, it meant reliable assistance during need and considerable independence during ordinary life. Neither account automatically establishes the correct approach. The partners should clarify what they intend to continue and what participation they expect from each other. Otherwise, the same word can conceal very different demands.

Consider a fictional couple, Ada and Samuel. In Ada's upbringing, people openly resolved conflicts, often with enthusiasm. When Samuel was growing up, adults tended to withdraw when facing a difficult subject and then return to it. To Ada, such actions are taken as a sign of refusal on the part of Samuel, but to Samuel, such an act is intimidating. They should understand the meanings of both activities and their workings.

Family experience can shape what a partner expects and how they interpret communication. In GAP Marriage Counselling Theory, those differences can show up as gaps in expectations, communication or meaning (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 3).

Applied educationally, this helps a couple ask which assumed rule is operating in a disagreement. The application does not predict the marriage's outcome. It provides language for clarification. A difference can be examined before either person

concludes that the other's conduct necessarily expresses lack of love or respect.

Looking for strengths as well as difficulties

Family exploration can become distorted when it searches only for dysfunction. An individual can recall the disagreements while forgetting about the care that their family provided during their sickness or education difficulties. Another may idealise the family's sacrifices while overlooking intimidation. A fuller account includes both. Ask what helped people endure, cooperate, learn, and repair. Then ask which practices created fear, exclusion, secrecy, or unreasonable burden. Preparation should support an accurate account rather than replace one simplified story with another.

Strengths should be described concretely. This is evident when the person describes the individuals who assisted, the help offered by them and the situations surrounding the matter. It would be possible for the grandmother to have provided consistency in the family. The sibling could have listened sympathetically. Parents should have shared the work fairly regardless of lack of money. The uncle could have realised his fault and restored what he had taken. They also identify people who may remain valuable sources of support.

It is useful to distinguish a resource from the cost attached to receiving it. A relative may offer accommodation but expect

authority over the couple's decisions. A parent may pay for the wedding and assume that the contribution entitles them to determine where the couple lives. Support can be substantial and the conditions can still require discussion. Gratitude does not remove the need for clarity. Before accepting assistance, the partners should understand what the giver expects and what they can freely agree to.

Partners can also identify family strengths they want to adapt rather than copy exactly. A tradition of hospitality may be valued while the future household needs limits on unplanned visits. Educational support will be maintained through a set budget, and not unlimited funding. Respect for elders may be expressed through consultation while leaving the final decision with the adults directly affected. Adaptation can preserve a value while changing the practical method used to express it.

Facilitators should ask whose contributions are missing from the account. Caregiving by women may be assumed rather than acknowledged. A less wealthy relative may have provided more dependable emotional support than the person who financed public celebrations. The disabled member of the household could have provided knowledge, humour or care. Listing such strengths increases the individual's knowledge about responsibility. It also discourages a view of family value based mainly on status, income, or public reputation.

What a genogram can help individuals see

A genogram is a visual way of organising family relationships and relevant information. In family assessment, it brings related information together and helps users examine patterns (McGoldrick et al., 2020). In this book, the proposed activity is a simplified educational family map. It can prompt useful conversation, but it does not authorise a pastor, parent, or untrained facilitator to make clinical interpretations or diagnose relatives.

Unlike a list of names, a map can show how people are connected and where important responsibilities sit. It may include several generations, marriages or partnerships, children, caregivers, household changes, deaths, and significant separations. For premarital purposes, the most useful information is what helps the individual understand current commitments, expectations, strengths, and unresolved questions. Including more detail is not automatically better. A large diagram filled with sensitive information can create risk without improving the decision.

The map should be accompanied by a plain legend explaining every mark. A partner can use an established professional notation system if trained, or clearly labelled shapes for a simple educational exercise. Conventional symbols vary across systems and contexts, so the meaning should never be assumed. State

whether a line represents a parent-child connection, a partnership, or caregiving. Identify uncertainty directly. A labelled box and an accurate explanation are preferable to an elaborate symbol that participants interpret differently.

An emotional relationship should also be described carefully. Instead of labelling two absent relatives permanently hostile, record what the participant knows: frequent arguments during a particular period, limited contact since a stated year, or a reported disagreement about property. A person's account matters, but it is still an account from one perspective. The facilitator should distinguish observation from inference and avoid transforming a participant's distress into a definitive judgement about everyone on the page.

Most importantly, the map should generate questions, not produce a verdict. Who provided care when circumstances changed? Which responsibilities continue? What does the individual want to preserve? What requires discussion with a prospective spouse? What information is unknown? A genogram cannot establish that a person will repeat a relative's conduct. It cannot prove compatibility, predict violence, or replace health advice. Its educational value lies in making relevant relationships and assumptions easier to describe and examine.

Constructing a family map with consent

Begin by explaining the purpose of the exercise and asking whether the participant wishes to take part. Describe what will be recorded, where it will be kept, and who can see it. Offer alternatives, such as private reflection or a fictional example. Participation should not depend on revealing intimate details. In a group programme, each individual can keep their own map and choose a limited observation to share. The educational objective is understanding, not access to the family's private history.

Start with the participant and the people most relevant to their upbringing and present responsibilities. Add parents or other caregivers, siblings, and existing children where applicable. Next, you include the names of your grandparents and all other family members who are important to you, depending on the amount of information that you have. You will find a three-generation pedigree chart perfect for your purposes; nonetheless, you do not have to be thorough in this respect. Your adoption, fostering, or anonymity can render the process impossible.

Be accurate. Identify who is connected to whom through parenthood, partnership, or caregiving. Note important dates only when known or clearly approximate. Mark a death as a death and limited contact as limited contact; they are different circumstances. If relationships changed over time, indicate the period rather than using one permanent description. Include

nonrelative caregivers where their role matters. The map should reflect lived care and responsibility as well as biological connections.

Next, add a small number of relevant observations. These might concern a household move, loss, financial obligation, source of support, or communication practice. Use the least sensitive detail necessary. Do not write a suspected diagnosis beside an absent person's name. If a participant mentions a health concern, record only what they choose to include and distinguish confirmed information from uncertainty. Questions about heredity, disease, or reproductive effects should be directed to qualified professionals, not to an amateur's map interpretation.

Finish by checking for accuracy and relevance. Find out what is missing from the map and whether a label seems misrepresentative.

Identify two or three questions it raises for premarital preparation. Agree on privacy arrangements and whether the participant wants to retain, revise, or remove the record. Where disclosure raises distress or a safety concern, pause and consider suitable support. The exercise should leave the individual with clearer agency, not with a sense that their family has been inspected and judged.

A worked educational example

Consider a fictional reader, Ayo, who is planning marriage with Miriam. Ayo was raised partly by his maternal grandmother while his mother worked in another town. His parents later lived separately. An older sister helped pay for his education. He now contributes monthly to his mother's living expenses and has promised to help a younger sibling complete training. His paternal uncle is an important adviser. Ayo's map should distinguish these different relationships rather than compress them into one statement that his family is demanding.

The map can show three generations of relatives and the caregiving connections that shaped his life. A separate note can identify current commitments. For example, the grandmother's historical caregiving belongs to the account of upbringing; the monthly contribution to his mother belongs to present planning. This advice from her uncle represents an influence but not necessarily a financial burden. The ability to draw the distinction will enable Miriam to analyse the proposed household without assuming that all family members have the same status or burden.

In contrast, Miriam comes from a different background where her parents were responsible for their expenses together while also expecting adult children to budget on their own. Ayo considers some obligations already settled because they

preceded the relationship. Their first task is to identify the actual amounts, duration, and promises involved. Their second is to discuss how decisions will be made in future. Neither can resolve the question by declaring their own upbringing normal.

A facilitator might ask Ayo which commitments he made explicitly and which he merely anticipates. What happens if his income falls? Who else can contribute? What does he believe gratitude requires? Miriam can explain what financial openness means to her and which arrangements she could freely accept. The discussion may produce a shared budget, a review date, or a need for further information. It should not make her responsible for undoing his earlier promises or require her to accept unspecified future obligations.

The example shows the value and limits of family mapping. Ayo's parents living separately does not predict failure in his marriage. His grandmother's care does not prove dependence. Miriam's family budgeting does not establish that her approach is universally better. The useful information concerns their present expectations and the practical life they propose. The map offers a route into that conversation. The decision still depends on clarity, conduct, consent, and whether a workable arrangement can be reached.

Responsibility to relatives and the proposed household

Extended-family responsibility can be a meaningful expression of belonging. Adults can help in supporting parents, education, bereavement, and relatives who are sick or unemployed. These practices can sustain people when formal support is limited. Premarital education should recognise their value while making their scale and conditions discussable. A couple needs to understand what each person already provides and what they expect to provide after marriage. General approval of family care does not settle every practical question.

Separate fixed commitments from occasional assistance. Monthly contributions, continued care contributions, and contributions made in emergencies create various demands. Please specify the amounts or periods, the expected time frame, and any other contributors involved. Partners should also distinguish a promise from a hope. I would like to pay my cousin's fees is not identical to I have committed to paying the next two years. A prospective spouse needs enough detail to understand which resources are already allocated and which choices remain open.

Consider unpaid work as well as money. A person may accompany a relative to appointments, organise family events, supervise children, or handle paperwork for an older parent.

These tasks may affect availability, employment, residence, and rest. If the proposed spouse is expected to assume some of them, that expectation should be stated and discussed. It should not be assigned automatically because of gender or marriage. A duty someone accepts freely differs from a role imposed after commitment.

Couples can develop a practical decision process. Which commitments continue? What amount can be set aside? Which requests require consultation? What happens during an emergency? When will the arrangement be reviewed? The answers may change as resources change. A process is often more useful than a promise to satisfy every request indefinitely. It helps the couple preserve generosity while recognising that income, time, housing, and caregiving capacity have limits.

Preventive Life Design situates family relationships alongside identity, decisions, habits and social circumstances (Adetunji, 2026b, Chapter 4). To apply that perspective, consider how an obligation to relatives would affect the couple's time, finances, care responsibilities and rest.

Staying connected while making adult decisions

For some people, setting a boundary with their families implies cutting ties completely. Others think that getting married means leaving family involvement behind right away. These are limited

choices. One can still be connected when making adult decisions. A person can hear a parent's concern and value the advice but still make a different decision. They can also decide freely to follow advice. The important question is whether the decision reflects thoughtful participation rather than fear, automatic compliance, or reflexive opposition.

Bowen theory's concept of differentiation of self concerns the capacity to think and act from a considered position while remaining in relationship with others (The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, n.d.-a). Used cautiously in education, it invites partners to examine how they respond to family pressure. It should not become a score for ranking African interdependence or a label attached to someone who values community. Relational closeness and personal agency can coexist.

A partner can practise explaining a decision without attacking the family. I value your advice, and we have decided to rent near our work for the first year states both connection and a choice. You have always ruined my life turns the conversation toward a broader accusation. Sometimes anger is understandable, but clearer language may help an ordinary disagreement remain focused. Where relatives use threats, coercion, or violence, language practice alone is insufficient; appropriate support and safety considerations take priority.

Partners should speak about their own family commitments directly. Someone may be tempted to tell parents that the prospective spouse refuses their request, when the couple actually reached a joint decision. This can expose the partner to blame and avoid personal accountability. A more honest statement describes the decision one has accepted. The aim is not to conceal disagreement but to avoid making another person the convenient explanation for a boundary one also believes is necessary.

Before marriage, discuss how each will respond when a relative disagrees. Will they promise something privately and expect the partner to comply later? Can they request time before answering? Are they willing to clarify a misunderstanding? What support might help? These questions reveal practical capacity more clearly than a declaration that family will never interfere. Disagreement is possible in any family network. Preparation should develop a way of responding that protects dignity and leaves the couple's actual commitments understandable.

When a third person becomes part of the disagreement

A couple's tension can spread to another person. One partner may repeatedly involve a parent, sibling, friend, or pastor in disagreements. The Bowen Center describes a triangle as a

three-person relationship system in which tension can shift among relationships without necessarily resolving the original issue (The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, n.d.-b). The concept provides a question for education: is this third person's involvement helping us address the concern, or mainly relocating the conflict?

Consider Ruth and Emmanuel, a fictional engaged couple discussing where to live. Emmanuel phones his sister after every difficult conversation. The sister then contacts Ruth to insist that she accept his preference. Ruth asks her brother to intervene, and he accuses Emmanuel of controlling the relationship. Several people are now arguing, while the couple's practical question remains unresolved. The educational task is to clarify residence, work, resources, and each person's wishes rather than simply secure more supporters for opposing positions.

However, consulting someone outside the relationship is not inherently unhelpful. Advice, safeguarding assistance, competent counselling, mediation in suitable circumstances, and independent emotional support can be valuable. A person experiencing intimidation should not be told to keep everything between the couple. The distinction concerns purpose, consent, competence, and safety. Does the helper enable clearer understanding and appropriate action? Or do they shame one

participant, enforce another's wishes, or circulate private information?

Partners can discuss how they will seek help. They might agree to avoid asking relatives to carry accusations during ordinary conflict and instead consult a suitable person together when appropriate. Each should retain freedom to obtain confidential individual support. The arrangement should not permit one partner to veto assistance needed for safety. A commitment to privacy must not become an instruction to conceal harm. A facilitator should explain this distinction before asking couples to promise discretion.

Pastors and parents should notice when they are being invited to take sides. They can ask what the actual issue is, what information is missing, and whether the setting allows both people to speak freely. They should not assume that the first account is complete. At the same time, credible disclosures of harm require a response centred on safety rather than a demand for joint confrontation. The role of a third person should match the concern, not merely the authority they hold in the community.

Loss separation migration and changes in care

Family histories include changes that may still influence present decisions. A death can reorganise responsibilities. Separation can alter residence and contact. Migration may introduce

distance, remittances, and uncertainty about where care will be available. A partner may have changed homes repeatedly or lived with different caregivers. These events deserve exploration because they can shape expectations. They should not be treated as automatic explanations for every difficulty or as proof that the person cannot form a stable partnership.

Ask what changed and what continues. After a parent's death, who took responsibility for younger children? Did a sibling become the main provider? Is that role still active? After relocation, which relationships remained accessible and which became harder to maintain? These questions can reveal practical commitments and sources of support. They can also identify uncertainty. A partner may not yet know whether an ageing relative will need care in the proposed household. The couple should discuss the possibility without presenting it as a settled fact.

Grief may enter wedding planning in quiet ways. A person might wish to honour a deceased parent, feel sadness around celebrations, or fear losing another important relationship. The prospective spouse can ask what would be supportive without assuming the correct response. Not every expression of grief needs a clinical explanation. If distress is persistent, overwhelming, or interferes substantially with functioning, suitable professional support may be helpful. The educational

setting should allow sensitivity without requiring public disclosure.

Migration deserves specific planning. A person relocating after marriage may become farther from familiar relatives, services, language, and employment. Family support that was dependable at home may be difficult to access abroad. The couple should discuss practical ways to retain contact and obtain independent assistance. Who can be contacted privately? What resources are available? What remains uncertain about work and residence? Appropriate local advice is needed for legal arrangements; a family map cannot resolve immigration or marital-status questions.

Some people maintain distance from relatives for protective reasons. Facilitators should not interpret every estrangement as immaturity or insist on reunion before marriage. They can ask what the participant wishes to understand and what contact is safe, without forcing reconciliation. Conversely, a person who has limited contact may still want to examine the relationship's meaning. The purpose is thoughtful preparation under current conditions. It is not to produce an ideal-looking family diagram through contact the participant does not freely choose.

Culture faith and different meanings of loyalty

Family expectations may reflect language, ethnicity, religion, region, generation, class, and particular household experience.

African families are not interchangeable. Even two people from the same community may have learned different rules. Premarital education should therefore ask participants to describe their own circumstances rather than infer them from identity. A general cultural account can suggest questions, but it should not supply answers about an individual who has not spoken.

Loyalty is one such question. For one family, loyalty means attending every important event. For another, it means contributing financially. Elsewhere, it may involve preserving privacy, accepting advice, or caring for an older relative. Partners should explain which practices they value and why. They should also identify expectations they cannot accept. A statement that someone is disloyal may conceal disagreement over a specific obligation. Clarifying the obligation makes a practical conversation possible.

Faith can contribute belonging, shared meaning, service, and support. It can also become a source of pressure if a relative claims religious authority over the adult's choice. Christian partners may reflect on honouring parents alongside the responsibility involved in establishing a marriage; Exodus 20:12 and Genesis 2:24 can inform that discussion. Interpretation should be thoughtful and should not authorise coercion or imply that marriage ends every responsibility to relatives. Individuals

from other traditions can examine comparable convictions within their own communities.

Interfaith or interethnic relationships need particular clarity about the life proposed. Which ceremonies matter? How will holidays be observed? What expectations concern children, food, residence, or religious participation? What will relatives be told? Partners should not postpone every difference until after marriage or agree publicly to practices they intend privately to reject. Equally, facilitators should avoid treating difference itself as evidence of failure. The question is whether the actual commitments are understandable and freely workable.

Traditions should be examined through their effects as well as their meanings. A practice may express welcome but create unaffordable costs. Another may honour elders while silencing the couple. Some can be adapted through discussion; others raise concerns requiring a clear limit. Facilitators should avoid speaking contemptuously about a community while retaining the ability to question harmful conduct. Respectful cultural engagement includes listening, explaining concerns precisely, and supporting decisions that preserve dignity and consent.

Sensitive information and the limits of verification

Family exploration sometimes reaches information about illness, criminal proceedings, substance use, property disputes, violence, or earlier relationships. These matters should be

approached according to relevance, reliability, consent, and professional competence. A rumour is not a confirmed fact. A legal accusation is not identical to a finding. A relative's diagnosis does not establish the participant's health status. Preparation should distinguish these categories before allowing information to influence the decision.

Ask why the information matters to the proposed marriage. An ongoing care responsibility may affect time and finances. A credible current threat may require safety support. A question about inherited health risks may warrant a qualified consultation. By contrast, curiosity about a distant relative's private history may provide little relevant understanding. The fact that something can be asked does not mean it must be recorded. Information gathering should have a clear educational purpose rather than become a search for scandal.

Individuals should not be required to contact unsafe relatives, produce inaccessible records, or answer questions they genuinely cannot resolve. Unknown information can be marked unknown. Where a fact is essential to a shared decision, the couple can identify a proportionate and lawful way to clarify it. If it remains unavailable, they must decide how much uncertainty they can accept. Inventing an answer or pressuring the participant to speculate will not improve the quality of the decision.

Facilitators should protect the privacy of absent family members as well as participants. A church course should not display real genograms to a congregation or circulate them among wedding committees. Sensitive information should not be placed in an unsecured group message. Participants need a clear explanation of confidentiality and its applicable limits. When professional or safeguarding obligations arise, the facilitator should follow relevant procedures and obtain competent advice rather than promise secrecy they cannot legally maintain.

Most importantly, family information should not substitute for present assessment of conduct. A partner from a respected home may still conceal obligations or use intimidation. Someone whose relatives experienced serious difficulties may show honesty, reflection, and dependable care. The family account can enrich understanding, but the individual must continue observing the person before them. It is unjust and ineffective to let inherited reputation replace examination of the actual relationship.

Using what the family map reveals

After constructing a map, identify a small number of matters requiring premarital discussion. These might involve residence, support to relatives, visits, caregiving, decision-making, or approaches to disagreement. Describe each matter without diagnosing the family. We have different expectations about

unplanned visitors is clearer than your family has no boundaries. The first statement identifies a question that can be addressed. The second may prompt a defence of the entire family and obscure the practical issue.

For each matter, separate what is known from what is assumed. We have promised to contribute this amount for one year is known if both parties understand the commitment. Your parents will probably demand everything is a prediction requiring examination. Ask what evidence supports the expectation, what information is missing, and who can appropriately clarify it. The map should help the couple think more accurately, including when their concern is justified and when they have moved beyond available evidence.

Then identify a possible arrangement. A couple may agree on visiting times, a financial contribution, a way of consulting relatives, or a review of care responsibilities. Specify who will communicate the arrangement and what happens if circumstances change. Avoid promises that depend entirely on another person's cooperation. We will ask relatives to give notice is a feasible action. No relative will ever visit unexpectedly is a guarantee the couple cannot provide. Preparation should distinguish intention from control.

Some questions require a pause. If one partner expects an arrangement the other cannot freely accept, additional

conversation or advice may be necessary. The educational goal is not to produce agreement immediately. A continuing disagreement about residence or responsibility for existing children may be fundamental to the proposed life. Both people should have room to decide. A facilitator should not dismiss the concern as ordinary family interference or instruct one person to accept it for the sake of the wedding.

Review the arrangement through conduct. Has the relevant conversation occurred? Were commitments described accurately? Did one partner make a contradictory private promise? Was the other's concern respected? Family preparation becomes useful when it changes how decisions are made. A completed genogram alone does not establish readiness. The stronger evidence lies in honest disclosure, clear communication, realistic planning, and the capacity to respond to family involvement without abandoning either dignity or responsibility.

An educational session that preserves dignity

Pastors, counsellors, and parents can introduce family history through fictional material before inviting personal reflection. Present a case involving an ordinary question, such as support to a parent or differing expectations about visits. Ask participants to identify relevant facts, assumptions, missing information, and possible arrangements. This allows learning without requiring

people to expose their relatives. It also helps facilitators notice whether they are making cultural or gender assumptions in their own responses.

For individual reflection, offer a blank page and a short explanation of the map's purpose. Participants may use names, initials, or role labels. They can include what is useful and leave other information private. Those who prefer not to draw can write a short account of caregivers, obligations, and support. The alternative should carry equal educational standing. A participant's willingness to reveal intimate material is not a measure of their seriousness about marriage.

If partners choose to compare observations, begin with a strength each wishes to carry forward. Then identify one expectation requiring discussion. Encourage questions that seek understanding rather than accusations about which family is better. A facilitator can ask what the practice means, what it requires, and whether a shared arrangement is possible. If either person becomes intimidated or a concern about harm emerges, stop ordinary joint work and consider appropriate private support.

Conclude with one practical action. A partner might clarify a financial promise, discuss anticipated care, or ask a safe relative about a family event they do not understand. Participation should not require contacting someone who poses a risk. Give a

review point and ask what information has become clearer. Evaluate whether the session improved understanding and agency, rather than whether every map was complete or every couple reached agreement.

The central lesson is that family history deserves attention because it contributes to the life people bring into marriage. It deserves care because the people involved retain dignity and privacy. Individuals can honour what sustained them, question what caused harm, and choose how they wish to live now. The next chapter turns to the routes through which prospective partners meet and the practical process of learning who the other person is before commitment.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Who provided care and belonging in my upbringing? Which family practice do I want to preserve, and which do I want to adapt? What continuing responsibility should a prospective spouse understand? Which judgement about my partner's family is based on observation, and which is an assumption? Can I make an adult decision while remaining respectful? Who could offer competent help without pressuring either person to comply? What information should remain private?

Family mapping exercise

Create a simple, clearly labelled map of significant relatives and caregivers across up to three generations where information is

available. Include present responsibilities and sources of support in separate notes. Mark uncertainty honestly. Identify one strength, one expectation, and one question for further discussion. Do not assign diagnoses or predict a person's conduct from ancestry. Choose one feasible action and review what it clarifies before making further commitments.

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Chapter 4

Meeting Someone and Learning Who They Are

An introduction begins a question

A person may meet a future spouse at a wedding in Lagos, through a cousin in Nairobi, during postgraduate study in Accra, at a church gathering in Johannesburg, or through a message received while living abroad. Another person may receive a photograph from an uncle who believes that two families would make a good connection. These beginnings deserve thoughtful attention. However, the way people meet cannot answer all the questions that arise when they consider building a life together.

An introduction establishes contact. Attraction makes contact interesting. Knowledge grows when people ask, listen, observe, clarify, and compare their expectations with the circumstances they actually encounter. These are different stages, although they often happen close together. A warm first meeting can create the feeling of familiarity before there is much information. Someone may feel understood because a conversation flows easily, while still knowing very little about the other person's obligations, availability for marriage, habits, or response to disagreement.

Consider a fictional couple, Teni and Samuel. They meet at a professional conference and discover that both value education, faith, and service. Within weeks, their friends describe them as a perfect match. Yet Samuel assumes that marriage will involve moving into his mother's home, while Teni expects a separate household near her workplace. Neither has deliberately deceived the other. Each has allowed a pleasant beginning to carry an unspoken picture of the future. Their early agreement has covered less ground than they imagined.

The purpose of getting acquainted is to give both people a fair opportunity to discover these realities before promises and arrangements become difficult to reconsider. It requires kindness because human beings are more than collections of facts. It also requires seriousness because affection cannot supply missing information. A person's dignity should be respected throughout the process, including when the eventual decision is to stop pursuing marriage.

For pastors, counsellors, and parents, the first question should therefore extend beyond where the couple met. Ask what they have learned since meeting, how they learned it, what remains uncertain, and whether either person feels free to slow down. A relationship can begin in an unconventional setting and develop responsibly. It can also begin in a respected setting and proceed with dangerous assumptions. Preparation examines the

developing relationship rather than awarding automatic approval to its point of origin.

When a friend or relative makes the connection

Introductions through relatives and friends can offer useful context. An introducer may know someone's family, have worked alongside the person, or have observed reliable conduct over several years. In communities where families remain closely involved in marriage, such information can help people begin a conversation with a clearer sense of background. The value of the introduction depends partly on what the introducer actually knows and how honestly the limits of that knowledge are explained.

An aunt who says, “I have known his parents for thirty years,” has provided information about a family connection. She has not necessarily provided information about the man's present relationships, financial responsibilities, private behaviour, or intentions. A cousin who studied with a woman ten years ago may remember her character at school but know little about her current life. Time, distance, and the setting in which people know one another all matter when interpreting a recommendation.

A responsible introducer can distinguish observation from assumption. “We worked together for two years, and she consistently kept her commitments” is more useful than “She

will be an excellent wife." The first statement describes something witnessed. The second predicts a role the introducer may never have observed. Even sincere recommendations should leave room for independent acquaintance. No relative can transfer complete knowledge of another adult into a marriage proposal.

Gratitude also needs a boundary. A single person may appreciate an introduction without owing the introducer a relationship. Parents should avoid turning the opportunity into a debt: "After everything your uncle has done, you cannot embarrass him." That pressure makes it harder to acknowledge a lack of attraction, incompatible plans, or troubling conduct. An introduction offered in love should preserve the freedom to decline respectfully.

Before connecting two people, the introducer should obtain their agreement to share contact details. Once contact begins, the prospective partners need room to speak for themselves. Relatives may remain available for appropriate questions, but should avoid demanding transcripts of every conversation or negotiating commitments that the couple has not made. They should also disclose any personal interest in the match, including expectations involving business, property, migration, or family alliances. An apparently neutral recommendation may carry interests that deserve recognition.

Pastors can help families use introductions constructively by stating a simple expectation at the beginning: the meeting creates an opportunity for consideration, and neither person is obliged to proceed. Such clarity can prevent embarrassment from becoming a substitute for consent. When the match ends, the families can preserve courtesy without circulating accusations or treating either person's decision as a public insult.

Familiarity at school, work, and social gatherings

School and workplace relationships offer repeated opportunities to see someone in a particular role. A classmate may reveal perseverance, generosity, or dishonesty during shared assignments. A colleague may demonstrate patience with junior staff or a habit of blaming others when work goes wrong. These observations can contribute to knowledge. They become misleading when competence in one setting is assumed to establish readiness for every responsibility within marriage.

A diligent employee may still avoid difficult personal conversations. An articulate student may have no realistic plan for managing household expenses. A generous organiser may help strangers readily while expecting a spouse to carry all domestic work. These possibilities do not cancel the positive qualities observed. They remind the couple to explore areas that their existing connection has not exposed. Marriage involves

decisions and vulnerabilities that may never arise during a lecture, staff meeting, or community project.

Power imbalances within the work environment require extra caution. In the event that someone has control over another individual's evaluation, job opportunities, or access to professional networks, it becomes hard for the less powerful person to decline being paid attention to. The couple needs to take into account if consent is truly freely given. Where necessary, they should obtain advice through suitable professional channels. A pastor's approval does not resolve a conflict of interest or remove pressure created by employment authority.

Social functions create a different limitation. Weddings, church celebrations, reunions, and festivals often place people in their most sociable surroundings. Clothes, generosity, dancing, eloquence, and public courtesy may make a strong impression. There is nothing wrong with appreciating these qualities. However, a festive encounter offers little evidence about how someone handles ordinary fatigue, an inconvenient request, a delayed payment, or a disagreement about priorities. Further acquaintance should move beyond the atmosphere of the event.

This does not mean manufacturing hardship to expose someone. Deliberately insulting a prospective partner, sending a friend to tempt them, or creating a false emergency produces

manipulation rather than trustworthy knowledge. Ordinary shared activities provide more ethical opportunities: arranging a meeting, deciding how to divide an expense, responding to a changed plan, or volunteering together. People can notice behaviour without turning courtship into an examination conducted under secret conditions.

Pastors and parents should also resist prestige as a shortcut. A respected employer, an advanced degree, or visibility in church may tell something meaningful about a person's life. These features do not establish how the individual treats a partner when nobody is watching. Encourage the couple to appreciate achievement while examining the habits that would shape their home. Public reputation and private relational conduct need their own evidence.

Online contact and the presentation of identity

Digital platforms have expanded the places where adults encounter potential partners. A person in Enugu may begin speaking with someone in London. A professional conversation on LinkedIn may develop into personal interest. Facebook groups, dating services, alumni networks, and messaging applications can connect people whose daily paths would otherwise never cross. The opportunity can be valuable, especially where work, migration, disability, or geography limits ordinary social contact.

Online presentation is selective. A profile may accurately display a qualification while saying nothing about a previous marriage. Photographs may show a person's appearance without revealing the circumstances in which the photographs were taken. Frequent messages can communicate attention without confirming identity or availability for commitment. The individual should avoid confusing the quantity of contact with the breadth of knowledge obtained through that contact.

At the same time, privacy is not automatically evidence of deception. A person may avoid posting a full name, workplace, or home address to protect personal safety. The appropriate question is whether trust develops through reasonable, reciprocal clarification as the relationship becomes more serious. Early caution can be sensible. Persistent refusal to clarify essential matters while demanding money, secrecy, exclusive commitment, or a wedding date requires a different response.

Both partners should be truthful about the purpose of their contact. Someone seeking friendship should avoid encouraging an assumption of courtship for the sake of attention. Someone seeking marriage should say so without treating every pleasant exchange as a proposal. The fact that a conversation started on a professional platform also calls for sensitivity. Interest should be

expressed respectfully, and a refusal should end the romantic approach without repeated messages or professional retaliation.

Digital affection can move rapidly because messages enter intimate spaces in a person's day. A morning greeting, a prayer before an interview, and a late evening conversation may create a powerful sense of companionship. This experience is real, but it should remain open to questions about the life beyond the screen. Who knows about the relationship? What commitments already exist? What would a visit involve? How would the relationship change if the couple lived in the same place?

Church leaders should avoid assuming that online beginnings are inherently unserious or morally inferior. They should teach the same expectations of honesty, consent, patience, and responsible preparation that apply elsewhere, while addressing the particular limits of remote contact. The goal is to help adults use available opportunities wisely. Shame about how they met can make a couple conceal concerns that responsible guidance could have helped them examine.

Verification with consent and proportion

Verification means checking an important claim through an appropriate source. It needs to be connected with some real decision-making, done legally and in proportion to the data being sought. It does not imply having unrestricted access to the other person’s equipment or gathering all his/her previous

details. A marriage decision requires meaningful honesty, but the process should preserve dignity and avoid treating another adult as property under inspection.

Start by identifying the claim. If someone says they are currently unmarried, ask what that means in their circumstances. Have they ever participated in a civil, customary, or religious marriage ceremony? Are they separated, divorced, widowed, or still involved in a relationship that another person regards as exclusive? Questions should be clear enough to avoid relying on different interpretations of the same word. Where formal status affects a proposed marriage, appropriate documents and qualified local advice may be needed.

Documents themselves require thoughtful handling. An image forwarded on a messaging application should not automatically settle a matter. Where verification is necessary, discuss how the information can be confirmed through the relevant institution or a qualified professional. Do not publish private documents in a family group. Do not retain identity numbers, addresses, or sensitive records without a clear reason. The couple should agree who needs access and how unnecessary copies will be avoided.

If both agree, a trusted friend or relative may be able to clarify a specific matter. Ask about events or conduct that person has actually observed.

Never hack an account, install tracking software, impersonate an official, or recruit someone to obtain confidential records improperly. Such conduct creates its own breach of trust and may cause harm. Equally, a demand that a partner prove love by surrendering passwords should be examined carefully. Mutual transparency can involve voluntary discussion and relevant disclosure without removing every personal boundary. Access to a phone cannot guarantee faithfulness or honesty.

If a significant question cannot be resolved, the couple may need to pause. A person is entitled to decline a requested disclosure, and the other person is entitled to decide that the remaining uncertainty prevents a responsible commitment. This is a choice about the conditions for marriage, rather than permission to coerce. A suitable counsellor can help clarify relevance and process while avoiding promises that any enquiry will uncover every concealed fact.

Observing consistency across ordinary life

Getting to know someone involves noticing whether words, actions, and explanations form a reasonably consistent picture over time. Nobody behaves perfectly in every setting. One can be distracted after a long trip or have trouble communicating after a tough week. The challenge is to interpret the patterns, including the individual's reaction to any mistake. One mistake and lies need to be interpreted differently.

Observe how plans are made and revised. Does the person communicate when unable to attend a meeting? Can they admit that a promise was unrealistic? Do they expect consideration for their own circumstances while refusing it to others? Reliability is not measured by never having a problem. It is partly expressed in how someone takes responsibility for the inconvenience their choices cause and whether their explanation can be discussed without punishment.

Observe treatment of people from whom no advantage is expected. A prospective partner may be attentive to a pastor while humiliating a waiter, driver, domestic worker, or younger relative. This conduct deserves discussion because a household will include people whose status and power differ. Courtesy offered only upwards in a social hierarchy leaves an important question unanswered. Likewise, public generosity should be considered alongside the ordinary obligations a person already carries.

GAP Marriage Counselling Theory distinguishes what people expect from what they do (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 3). In courtship, compare the partnership someone describes with how they make decisions. If a person says they value consultation but repeatedly decides alone, ask how they expect shared decisions to work.

Discuss observations concretely. “When we agreed to consult each other about the visit, you confirmed the travel date without asking me” permits examination of a particular event. “You are controlling by nature” makes a sweeping judgement and may obscure what needs attention. However, precision should never become an excuse to minimise threats, intimidation, or violence. Some conduct calls for safety and specialist help rather than repeated attempts to improve the wording of a conversation.

Consistency also includes your own behaviour. Are you presenting preferences honestly, or agreeing to everything because you fear losing the person? Are you concealing responsibilities that would affect a shared life? A fair process asks both partners to participate. Seeking knowledge should help each person become more truthful, rather than allowing one to act as an examiner while remaining beyond examination.

Learning intentions before designing a future

Two people may use the same language of love while seeking different kinds of relationship. One may hope for marriage soon. The other may want companionship without deciding about marriage. A third may be attracted to the possibility of migration, financial stability, social respectability, sexual access, or relief from loneliness. Human motives can be mixed. Their complexity makes honest discussion necessary rather than making every practical consideration shameful.

Ask why the relationship matters to each person at this stage of life. What do they hope marriage will make possible? What needs are they bringing into the connection? Which responsibilities do they believe they can undertake? These questions invite reflection beyond an answer such as “Because I love you.” Affection matters, but it cannot specify where the couple will live, how they will manage competing obligations, or whether both intend the same level of commitment.

Consider a fictional example involving Esther and Daniel, who live in different countries. Esther is preparing for a relationship in which both can continue their careers. Daniel imagines a wife who will immediately leave paid employment and support his extended family household. Their conversations have centred on a wedding date and immigration arrangements. When they discuss everyday life, each discovers that the other has been working towards a different destination. Earlier discussion would have allowed them to assess these differences with less pressure.

Practical motives should be addressed without contempt. A person may reasonably desire stability or hope to live near a spouse abroad. The concern is whether these wishes are openly discussed and whether the individual values the partner as a person with their own needs and freedom. A relationship becomes ethically troubling when affection is performed to

obtain benefits that the other person would not willingly provide if the true intention were known.

Listen for room to negotiate. Can both people describe preferences, uncertainty, and limits? Is one required to accept a complete future already designed by the other? Someone may have a firm commitment that they cannot change, such as caring for a dependent relative. Honest disclosure allows a prospective partner to consider whether that arrangement is compatible with their own life. Concealment denies that opportunity and may create conflict after marriage.

The next chapter will examine difficult conversations more extensively. Here, the essential point is timing. Intentions should begin to become clear before the couple announces a marriage, transfers substantial money, abandons employment, or undertakes relocation. Wedding preparation can create momentum that makes disagreement feel like betrayal. It is easier to ask what a relationship means while both people still have practical freedom to consider the answer.

Long-distance courtship and the missing everyday context

Long-distance relationships can contain sincerity, commitment, and substantial shared history. They can also leave important areas of everyday life unseen. Calls often occur at selected times, after work is finished or when the household is quiet. Each

person may show the part of life that is convenient to share. Neither has necessarily observed how the other manages routine demands across a whole day or responds when several responsibilities compete.

Develop conversations that include ordinary realities. Discuss working hours, commuting, family care, existing financial obligations, social commitments, and plans for rest. Ask how these arrangements would change if the couple lived together. A person who sends attentive messages late at night may still have very limited time for a shared household. The issue is whether the couple has a realistic understanding of availability rather than whether affection is expressed frequently.

Visits, where feasible, can broaden knowledge when they involve more than celebrations and carefully arranged outings. A couple can discuss groceries, transport, schedules, and the practical shape of the community in which they might live. Meeting relevant family members or friends may provide context, with appropriate consent and boundaries. A visit still offers a limited sample. It should contribute to a larger process rather than being treated as conclusive proof of character.

Distance can create power inequities as well. The individual who has control over travel money or lodging may inadvertently or intentionally place the visiting individual in a position where he or she is reliant on the other party. Prior to your departure, ensure

that there are plans made which leave the visitor in a position where they have the freedom of choice. Keep yourself accessible through documentation and communications.

Technology can assist sustained conversation but cannot remove every uncertainty. A video call may allow a more direct exchange than text, yet it cannot independently establish all claims about identity, relationship status, work, or finances. Nor should a partner be required to remain continuously visible online. Constant location checking and demands for immediate replies can become intrusive. Communication should be accountable and allow for regular activities such as working, sleeping, making friends, and being alone.

When there is distance between both parties, set out a realistic way forward to become acquainted. Work out what you can discuss online, what will need an in-person discussion, and what will require professional input. Include the possibility that circumstances will delay a decision. There is no universal number of months that makes a relationship ready for marriage. The quality and breadth of the knowledge gained matter alongside time, and serious unanswered questions should remain visible even after a long courtship.

Meeting in person without surrendering choice

A first meeting should create space to decide whether further contact is wanted. It should not trap either person in an

arrangement that is difficult to leave. This matters whether the pair met online or were introduced by a trusted relative. A recommendation can reduce uncertainty about some facts while leaving the visitor's practical safety needs intact. Suitable precautions should be understood as ordinary care rather than an accusation against the other person.

Australia's eSafety Commissioner (2026) advises meeting only when you feel ready and telling someone you trust about your plans. Choose a familiar, accessible place and arrange a way to leave independently.

Agree on expectations before the meeting. Is it a conversation over lunch, a visit involving family, or a longer trip? Who will pay for which expenses? Does either person believe the meeting implies engagement or sexual intimacy? Assumptions can become pressure when they remain unspoken. Paying for a ticket, meal, or hotel does not purchase another person's consent. Either adult may decide that they do not want the relationship to progress.

For cross-border visits, practical independence deserves particular attention. The visitor should understand where they will stay, how they will communicate, and how they can return if the relationship does not develop. Essential documents should remain accessible to their owner. Immigration and travel requirements should be checked through current official

information or qualified advice relevant to the countries involved. A romantic partner's reassurance cannot replace an understanding of one's own position.

Parents and church leaders should avoid arranging public commitments before the couple has had a meaningful opportunity to meet. A welcome dinner can unexpectedly become an engagement announcement. Relatives may arrive with gifts, photographers, or expectations of ceremonial consent. Even well-intended celebration can make refusal humiliating. Clarify that an initial visit is for acquaintance unless both adults have freely agreed to something more.

After the meeting, allow time for private reflection. The couple should be able to describe their experience separately before discussing next steps together. A person may need to acknowledge disappointment without immediately managing another person's emotions. If discomfort involved intimidation, coercion, or threats, appropriate support should take priority. Do not insist on a private confrontation as the only honourable way to end contact when such a confrontation may increase danger.

Romance fraud and urgent financial demands

Financial requests require particular caution when a relationship exists mainly through remote contact. A person may be generous by nature, and another person's distress may be genuine. Nevertheless, affection should not require ignoring uncertainty.

An urgent story, a promised visit, or an impressive professional identity can create pressure to act before basic facts are established. A prospective partner should never have to prove love by accepting an unexplained financial risk.

The United States Federal Trade Commission describes romance scams in which a person builds emotional trust and then invents an emergency or another reason to request money. Its guidance advises against sending money or gifts to an online romantic contact one has not met in person, and recommends speaking with someone trusted if deception is suspected (Federal Trade Commission, 2022). These warnings concern conduct rather than nationality, occupation, or social class. An in-person meeting also does not make every later request safe.

Be especially careful when a request combines urgency with secrecy. “Send the money today, but do not tell your family because they will oppose our love” removes opportunities for independent judgement. A demand for an investment, customs payment, hospital fee, or travel expense should be assessed through appropriate channels rather than only through contact details supplied by the requester. Do not provide bank credentials, security codes, or access to accounts to demonstrate commitment.

Chika has been speaking online with a woman who says she works abroad and plans to visit. Shortly before the trip, she asks

for money to release an unexpected payment. When Chika suggests checking the request independently, she says he must send the money to prove that he trusts her. The urgency, pressure and resistance to verification give him reasons to stop and check before acting.

In case funds have already been transferred and there is suspicion of fraud, take immediate action through the bank or payment service providers. Preserve relevant communications where safe to do so. Reporting options vary by jurisdiction, so obtain current information rather than assuming a foreign agency can handle a local complaint. A pastor or counsellor can offer emotional support while helping the person find suitable practical assistance.

Avoid humiliating someone who has been deceived. Mockery may make it harder to disclose further losses or seek help. The person needs a setting in which facts can be examined without being reduced to foolishness. Recovery may include financial planning, emotional care, and rebuilding confidence in judgement. The lesson for premarital education is to establish protective boundaries early, while still recognising that responsibility for deception belongs to the deceiver.

When the wedding becomes the first real meeting

Some couples plan most of their wedding remotely and meet physically only shortly before the ceremony, or on the wedding

day itself. Others participate in arrangements described as marriage in absentia and later relocate to live together. These circumstances deserve careful preparation because the transition may combine a new relationship, a new household, a new community, and practical dependence in a single step. The amount left to learn can be substantial.

Where such arrangements are proposed, distinguish ceremonial plans from legal questions and relational preparation. The validity and consequences of a particular marriage arrangement depend on the applicable law and the facts. Obtain qualified advice in the relevant jurisdiction rather than assuming that family agreement, a religious ceremony, or a video connection settles every issue. This chapter cannot determine the legal standing of an individual marriage across different African countries or destination countries.

Ask what has prevented an earlier meeting. Work, travel costs, visas, illness or caregiving may be genuine obstacles. Where feasible, arrange to meet before the ceremony or delay the commitment so both people have time to reflect without guests waiting for a decision.

An important issue is the freedom to say no. A visitor arriving for a wedding may have already left employment, spent savings, or accepted public congratulations. These investments can make doubts difficult to express. Families should explicitly preserve

the possibility of delay if essential concerns emerge. Financial loss and embarrassment are painful, but they should not become reasons to compel a lifelong promise. A wedding date is an arrangement people can reconsider.

Where a marriage has already occurred, preparation remains worthwhile. The couple can clarify expectations before relocation, identify independent support, understand housing and income arrangements, and discuss how disagreements will be addressed. Counsellors should avoid saying that learning is now useless. Earlier preparation offers advantages that cannot be recreated completely, yet useful work can still improve understanding and support responsible decisions after a ceremony.

Keeping a realistic record of what is known

Before announcing a wedding, a couple can make a simple record of essential knowledge. This is a reflective aid rather than a scoring instrument. Each person identifies significant matters, the basis of their understanding, and questions that remain. The exercise can reveal how much has been assumed from affection, family reputation, or a brief answer. It can also show areas where both people have already developed a sound, shared understanding.

For example, “We will live in Kumasi” may be supported by repeated discussion but still depend on employment that has not

been secured. “There are no existing marriage commitments” may require clarification about a previous customary ceremony. “We will support our parents” may hide disagreement about the amount, frequency, and limits of support. Record the distinction between an established fact, a current intention, and a hope that depends on future circumstances.

Do not turn the record into an intrusive collection of confidential material. It can note that an appropriate professional has advised on a relevant question without circulating the underlying documents. Health information should be handled with particular care and discussed through suitable healthcare guidance when necessary. Past experiences should not be demanded merely to satisfy curiosity. The relevance of a question to shared responsibilities should be clear.

The record should include the couple's process as well as its content. Can they acknowledge uncertainty without becoming defensive? Can either person request time? Do they agree on how outstanding questions will be addressed? A list filled with confident answers is less useful if one partner was afraid to disagree. Counsellors should therefore create space for individual reflection and be attentive to pressure that a joint discussion may conceal.

Choose a manageable next step for each significant uncertainty. Arrange a conversation about housing, seek advice about a

previous marriage, clarify a dependent's needs, or plan a visit that broadens acquaintance. Some questions will be resolved. Others may remain because information is unavailable or because the partners disagree. Uncertainty should be assessed for its importance rather than hidden beneath a ceremonial deadline.

Knowing another person is never complete. Marriage involves change, and even a careful couple will encounter circumstances they could not foresee. The aim is sufficient truthful knowledge for a responsible decision, combined with the ability to keep learning. This requires humility: confidence about what has been established, honesty about what has not, and willingness to reconsider when important new information appears.

Guidance that strengthens the couple's freedom

Pastors, counsellors, and parents contribute best when they help a couple think clearly rather than selecting a spouse on the couple's behalf. A leader can ask how the relationship began, what the partners know about each other, and how freely they are deciding. The conversation should make room for both the benefits and the limits of the route through which they met. It should not treat family introduction, church membership, or foreign residence as a guarantee.

Avoid language that certifies what cannot be known. “I have met him, so you have nothing to worry about” gives reassurance

beyond the leader's evidence. A more responsible statement identifies the observation and its limits: “He discussed his plans openly in our meeting, but you still need to clarify your living arrangements together.” Such precision protects the couple from confusing respect for a leader with certainty about a partner.

Parents can provide valuable family context while admitting gaps in their knowledge. Counsellors can help distinguish a solvable practical problem from an unresolved difference about the proposed life together. Pastors can support reflection on faith, responsibility, and consent. None should promise that prayer, an assessment form, or a counselling certificate will eliminate future difficulty. Preparation is a serious contribution to judgement, and its value does not require pretending it controls every outcome.

Communities should also make postponement possible without disgrace. A couple may discover that they need more time, that a crucial claim was misleading, or that their plans are incompatible. Leaders can discourage gossip and help relatives respond with restraint. If public announcements have already been made, the couple may need assistance communicating a limited explanation that preserves privacy. They should not be forced to reveal intimate details to justify a decision.

For singles, the central responsibility is to remain an active participant in learning. Do not delegate the entire decision to an

introducer, a prophet, a matching service, or a counsellor. Welcome appropriate help, ask meaningful questions, and notice what happens when you express a boundary. Offer the same honesty you seek. The person you may marry deserves a truthful opportunity to understand your life and decide whether to share it.

An introduction can open a promising door. Responsible acquaintance helps the couple understand what lies beyond it. Before they make a public promise, they need space to see, ask, verify where appropriate, and reflect without intimidation. When that process is respected, the eventual decision to proceed, pause, or part can rest on a more honest understanding of the people and the life involved.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Describe how your relationship began. What did that setting allow you to observe, and which important areas of life remain outside its view?
2. Specify three statements that pertain to marriage and differentiate what you have seen, what you have heard and what needs clarification.
3. Consider the significance of your relationship to both parties involved. What is it that marriage should be able to give each of you, and what is it that you should be responsible for?
4. For a long-distance relationship, create a strategy for acquaintance which will include independence, support and the right to change the mind.
5. For pastors, counsellors, and parents: write a response to a couple who wishes to postpone a wedding. Does your response help them think and decide freely?
6. Review an introduction you have offered or received. Which parts of the recommendation were based on direct knowledge, and which were predictions or assumptions?

The cases in this chapter are fictional illustrations. The questions are educational prompts, not a validated assessment or a guarantee of safety or marital success.

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Chapter 5

Asking Difficult Questions with Honesty and Dignity

Why essential questions are postponed

Before marriage, people need opportunities to ask questions whose answers could affect their willingness or readiness to share a life. These conversations concern intentions, existing commitments, money, health, intimacy, family responsibilities, faith, and future plans. Their purpose is to support an informed decision. To ask well means recognising what is important, clarifying why it is important, and listening intently enough to understand the answer. To answer well means speaking the truth without distorting the other person's judgement.

Many couples postpone these conversations because the relationship feels precious. One person worries that a question about debt will sound materialistic. Other fears that discussing previous relationships will appear judgemental. A woman may believe that asking about household decisions will make her seem disrespectful. A man may fear that disclosing uncertainty about employment will make him appear incapable. The couple can become skilled at protecting the pleasant atmosphere while leaving important parts of the proposed marriage unexplored.

Families and religious communities sometimes add pressure. An introduction may come with strong assurances that the match is suitable. A couple may already have received public congratulations. The person with doubts may therefore fear disappointing relatives or appearing spiritually disobedient. Yet respect for family and faith does not remove the need for personal understanding. A decision made under silence can carry consequences that the approving community will not experience in the same way as the spouses.

Consider a fictional couple, Amina and Joseph. They have discussed their wedding colours, guest list, and travel arrangements repeatedly. Joseph assumes that Amina will manage his business accounts after marriage, without payment. Amina plans to continue a separate career and contribute to shared expenses. Each thinks these expectations are obvious. Their difficulty begins before any argument: they have organised the celebration more thoroughly than the responsibilities it celebrates.

A difficult question need not become an accusation. “What would you expect my working life to look like after marriage?” gives Joseph an opportunity to explain his assumption. Amina can then describe her own plan. The answer may reveal agreement, a negotiable difference, or an incompatibility. All three possibilities are useful information. A couple does not

benefit from avoiding a relevant truth simply because it may complicate a preferred outcome.

This chapter explains how to make such conversations purposeful and humane. It also addresses situations in which shared discussion is insufficient or unsafe. Truth matters, but no person should be forced to disclose sensitive information in a setting that exposes them to humiliation, retaliation, or danger.

Establishing the conditions for a fair conversation

A serious conversation requires more than a quiet room. Both people need a reasonable opportunity to participate, understand the subject, and decide how to respond. Choose a time when neither is rushing into work or struggling to stay awake. Avoid introducing a major issue during an argument about something else. Explain the purpose beforehand where possible, so that one person does not arrive expecting a pleasant outing and encounter an unexpected interrogation.

Discuss one manageable subject at a time. “I would like us to talk about where we would live and what each arrangement would involve” is clearer than announcing that every concern about the relationship must be settled immediately. Agree on enough time for a meaningful exchange while allowing a pause. Some information needs checking, and some questions require thought. A demand for instant certainty can encourage an answer

designed to end the conversation rather than an answer that reflects reality.

The conditions should also be reciprocal. If you ask about the other person's obligations, be prepared to explain your own. If you request clarification about a previous marriage, acknowledge any comparable commitment in your history. Reciprocity does not mean that every experience is identical or that all details must be disclosed equally. It means that neither person assumes a privileged position in which they may scrutinise the other while withholding information relevant to the same shared decision.

Privacy deserves explicit agreement. Decide whether the conversation will remain between the couple or whether some part needs appropriate professional guidance. A trusted counsellor may help with a difficult issue, but a family group chat is rarely a suitable place for sensitive disclosure. Avoid recording conversations without clear agreement. Notes, when useful, should capture shared understanding and outstanding questions rather than create a private archive of another person's vulnerabilities.

A couple may also need to consider language. One partner may express complicated ideas more comfortably in Yoruba, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, or another language, even if ordinary conversation happens in English. Where translation is necessary,

choose assistance that protects confidentiality and does not give a relative control over the message. Allow explanations of important terms. Words such as support, submission, partnership, independence, and respect can carry substantially different expectations.

The basic agreement is that questions may be asked respectfully, answers may be considered carefully, and either person may identify a boundary. This agreement does not oblige the couple to proceed towards marriage. It creates conditions under which they can discover whether proceeding would be responsible.

Asking clearly without deciding the answer beforehand

A useful question separates the subject from an accusation about character. “What debts or financial commitments would affect our household?” identifies a matter relevant to marriage. “How much trouble have you hidden from me?” assumes concealment before the person answers. The second wording may make an honest respondent defensive and may distract from the information needed. Clarity helps the couple address the issue directly.

Begin with questions that invite explanation. Ask what someone means by a good marriage, how they expect decisions to be made, or which responsibilities they already carry. Follow with specific questions when necessary. Broad answers can sound

reassuring while leaving crucial details untouched. If a person says, “I will always support my family,” ask who currently depends on that support and what the commitment involves in practice.

Avoid questions that announce the preferred response. “You would never expect me to stop working, would you?” communicates the desired answer before inviting reflection. A person may agree quickly to preserve harmony while continuing to imagine a different future. “What are your expectations about both of us working after marriage?” gives more room for a truthful response. You can then state your own position clearly rather than hiding it within the question.

Questions should also be relevant and proportionate. Asking about dependants, a current legal obligation, or a health condition that requires shared planning has a clear connection to married life. Demanding a detailed account of every childhood humiliation or every private thought does not automatically improve preparation. Before asking, consider what decision the answer would inform. Curiosity alone is insufficient reason to require intimate disclosure.

Some matters require a direct answer before further exploration. “Are you currently married to anyone?” should not be replaced by an abstract discussion about commitment. Follow-up questions may be needed to clarify civil, customary, or religious

arrangements and previous relationships. Precision can coexist with courtesy. Where legal status is uncertain, the couple should obtain appropriate local advice rather than attempting to settle the issue through vocabulary alone.

A helpful sequence is to name the topic, explain its relevance, ask the question, and allow an answer before responding. This is an educational suggestion rather than a prescribed clinical technique. Its value is practical: it makes the purpose visible and reduces the chance that the other person will hear an unexplained attack. The quality of the conversation still depends on honesty and freedom to disagree.

Listening for meaning rather than reassurance

Listening well involves understanding what the person is saying, including the assumptions beneath familiar words. A partner may say, “My parents will always come first.” This could mean that their parents' basic needs will remain a serious responsibility. It could also mean that parental preferences will determine every household decision. The statement requires clarification before it is interpreted as either admirable loyalty or inevitable conflict.

Reflect what you understand in ordinary language. “When you say they come first, do you mean financial care, where we live, or who has the final say?” invites the person to specify the meaning. After an explanation, summarise it and ask whether

you have understood correctly. Summarising is particularly useful when the subject carries emotional weight. People can hear familiar phrases through their own history and overlook the distinction the speaker intended.

Two people can use the word “respect” while holding different expectations about whether a decision may be questioned. GAP Marriage Counselling Theory describes this as a possible gap in meaning (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 3). Ask what respect looks like in an actual disagreement.

Listen to the answer you receive rather than replacing it with the answer you hoped to hear. If someone says they do not want children, do not assume marriage will change their mind. If a person expects a spouse to move abroad permanently, do not privately substitute the hope that the move will be temporary. Affection may make an unwelcome answer painful, but pain is not evidence that the answer was unclear.

Notice your own responses without allowing them to decide every interpretation. A question may awaken memories of earlier betrayal, criticism, or rejection. That history can affect what you hear. You may need to say, “This subject makes me anxious, and I want to be certain I have understood you.” Acknowledging your reaction can support clarification. It should not become a reason to dismiss a genuine contradiction or excuse threatening conduct.

Listening does not require agreement. You can understand a preference and still conclude that it is incompatible with your own commitments. The purpose is to create an accurate basis for deciding. A partner deserves to be heard truthfully, and you deserve to make your decision from what the person actually expresses.

Exploring the reasons for seeking marriage

Ask why each person wants marriage now. The answer may include affection, companionship, faith, parenthood, stability, social expectations, or the wish to establish a home. Several motives can coexist. The conversation becomes useful when the couple examines how these motives would shape expectations. A desire for companionship may involve extensive daily time together, while a desire for financial security may include assumptions about who will provide and who may control spending.

Discuss what each person hopes a spouse will contribute emotionally. Does someone expect marriage to remove loneliness completely, repair every wound from childhood, or provide constant affirmation? A partner can offer meaningful care, but cannot reasonably become the only source of support or the solution to every difficulty. Asking about needs helps the couple consider which expectations belong within their

relationship and which may also require friendships, community, personal work, or qualified assistance.

In a fictional example, Kofi tells Lydia that he wants marriage because he is tired of making decisions alone. Lydia welcomes the prospect of shared responsibility. Later, she discovers that he expects her to organise his appointments, reconcile every disagreement with relatives, and manage his emotional distress whenever plans change. The original statement contained a need that deserved fuller discussion. Shared decision-making and transferring most personal responsibility to a spouse are different arrangements.

Explore the expected pace of commitment. One person may seek a wedding within six months because of age, immigration plans, or family pressure. The other may need longer to understand the relationship. The reason for urgency should be discussed openly. Urgency is information about circumstances, but it does not establish readiness. A person should not have to accept unresolved questions simply to demonstrate seriousness about marriage.

Ask what happens if the relationship does not proceed. Can the other person accept disappointment without threats, financial demands, or public humiliation? You need not create a false breakup to test the response. Discuss freedom directly: “I want us both to be able to decide honestly, including if either of us

needs to stop." If that freedom is rejected, the difficulty concerns the conditions of consent as well as the proposed future.

Both partners should also identify what they are willing to contribute. Asking only what marriage will provide can obscure the responsibilities involved. What care, practical effort, accountability, and willingness to learn can each offer? An honest answer may include limitations. Recognising those limitations before marriage allows more realistic planning than promises shaped entirely by enthusiasm.

Previous relationships and existing responsibilities

Previous relationships can affect present responsibilities in ways that need clarification. These may include children, financial support, custody arrangements, ongoing contact, property matters, or unresolved marital status. The relevant question is how the history affects the proposed shared life. A conversation should not become a moral ranking of people according to whether they have been divorced, widowed, abandoned, or involved in relationships that ended painfully.

Ask about current commitments directly. If someone has children, discuss their needs, existing arrangements, and the role a future spouse is expected to undertake. A child should not be treated as a concealed inconvenience that can be managed after the wedding. Equally, the prospective spouse should not be assigned parental duties without discussion. Existing parents and

other caregivers may have responsibilities and rights that require appropriate professional advice.

Where a previous marriage is involved, distinguish separation from a completed divorce and clarify any customary or religious arrangements relevant to the proposed marriage. A couple should not rely entirely on the phrase “It is over.” The emotional end of a relationship and its legal consequences may require different evidence. Laws and procedures vary, so obtain qualified advice in the relevant jurisdiction rather than accepting a leader's confidence as a legal determination.

Discuss contact with former partners in relation to present obligations. Communication about a child may be necessary and appropriate. Secret romantic involvement is a different matter. The couple needs expectations that protect honesty without obstructing responsible parenting. Demanding that someone abandon all contact with the other parent can harm a child and create avoidable conflict. The details deserve careful thought rather than a rule based only on jealousy or discomfort.

Share what is relevant to present decisions and responsibilities. Intimate details of past sexual experiences or trauma can remain private. A qualified professional can help someone decide what to disclose when past events continue to affect their wellbeing or safety.

Finally, consider the language used about previous partners. A person may legitimately describe serious mistreatment. Listen without requiring them to prove every detail to satisfy curiosity. At the same time, notice whether they can identify their own choices where relevant or whether every ordinary disagreement is explained through contempt. This observation supports further conversation; it does not authorise a counsellor to decide an unseen former relationship from one account.

Relevant legal history may also need discussion. A current criminal proceeding, a court order, or an obligation arising from a conviction could affect safety, finances, travel, or family responsibilities. Ask about the actual matter and its present implications rather than treating every allegation or past conviction as proof of permanent unworthiness. An accusation is not the same as a conviction, and a person may have undergone meaningful change. Equally, genuine rehabilitation should not require a prospective spouse to ignore current risk or accept an inaccurate account.

Where clarification is necessary, use lawful, appropriate sources and qualified advice. Do not obtain restricted records through deception or circulate allegations within the community. A counsellor should not attempt to determine guilt from a premarital interview. The relevant task is to identify what information affects an informed decision, what can reasonably

be established, and whether any unresolved concern calls for specialist assistance. Fairness to the person being questioned and care for the prospective partner both deserve attention.

Discussing money before financial dependence develops

Money questions are questions about shared responsibilities and practical freedom. Discuss income, existing debts, dependants, spending habits, savings, and expectations about contribution. Some people feel ashamed because their income is modest or irregular. Others fear that disclosing wealth will attract demands. These concerns deserve respect, but a proposed household still needs an honest understanding of the resources and obligations on which its plans depend.

Begin with current circumstances rather than an ideal future. “What income can we reasonably expect at present?” is more useful than relying on a promised promotion or an unconfirmed business contract. Discuss the difference between stable income, occasional earnings, and hoped-for opportunities. A couple can plan within uncertainty when uncertainty is named. They struggle when speculative income is presented as money already available.

Ask what led to a debt, what remains to be paid and how repayment would affect the household. A student loan, a failed

business and recurring unaffordable spending can have different implications.

Explore who will make financial decisions. Will either spouse need permission for every personal expense? How will both obtain information about shared obligations? What happens if one becomes unemployed or undertakes unpaid care? A partner's contribution may include work that does not produce a salary. The couple must deliberate on issues of access, accountability, and autonomy, instead of just thinking that one earning more becomes the absolute authority over finances.

In a fictional example, Nneka wants to set aside a fixed monthly amount for her mother’s care. Emeka expects to meet every request from his relatives as it arises. They need to compare these expectations with their income and agree on how to handle emergencies.

Financial details are private matters and must be dealt with in a proper manner without any breach of trust. This does not mean giving the other person account passwords or control over finances or even borrowing money. Major transfers and commitments deserve independent consideration, especially if the wedding or relocation would make one partner financially dependent on the other.

Health questions without stigma or forced exposure

Health can affect every day routines, care needs, finances, intimacy, and future plans. Premarital conversations should make room for these realities without assuming that illness, disability, or a mental health history makes someone unsuitable for marriage. The useful questions concern present needs, relevant risks, support, and how the couple would plan together. A diagnosis alone cannot describe the whole person or determine the quality of a future relationship.

Ask how each person currently manages their wellbeing and whether any condition or treatment calls for shared planning. Someone may need accessible housing, regular appointments, rest during episodes of illness, or continuity of medication when relocating. The person living with the condition should be able to describe their experience in their own terms. A pastor or prospective spouse should avoid making clinical conclusions from a label or a brief conversation.

Discuss HIV testing with a qualified healthcare provider. The World Health Organization (n.d.-b) identifies five essentials for HIV testing services: consent, confidentiality, counselling, accurate results and connection to prevention, care and treatment. Premarital guides should respect the person's right to make a voluntary and private decision about testing.

If a couple wishes to consider relevant health screening, a qualified clinician can advise on what is appropriate for their circumstances and explain the meaning and limits of results. No collection of tests guarantees that a marriage will be healthy, that children will have no health difficulties, or that future illness will not occur. Avoid treating a laboratory report as a certificate of a person's moral value or as an assurance against every uncertainty.

Discuss sharing results and other sensitive information before disclosure occurs. Who will receive the information? Is there a reason for a counsellor to see it, or can the couple work with healthcare professionals directly? How will records be protected? Where disclosure could lead to violence, abandonment, or public exposure, specialist support may be needed to plan a safer process. The urge to disclose information during a joint session must not overshadow these issues.

Issues of mental well-being must not be about diagnosing but comprehension. One must ask about the challenges that make daily life difficult, what assistance is working for the individual, and what reaction is appropriate from the partner. Clinical enquiries remain the domain of professionals. Marital education can support informed planning while respecting professional limits; it cannot replace assessment, treatment, or individual advice about medication and care.

Intimacy parenthood and freedom to express a boundary

Intimacy questions often remain unasked because couples fear embarrassment or believe that commitment will automatically produce agreement. Yet expectations about affection, sexual contact, privacy, and parenthood can differ substantially. A premarital conversation does not require explicit descriptions of sexual activity. It requires room to state values, needs, limits, and uncertainties that would affect the shared relationship.

Ask what affection and closeness mean to each person. Some people value frequent conversation, physical affection or practical companionship, and preferences can change with circumstances. Discuss how you will communicate comfort and willingness. Consent to sexual activity remains necessary in marriage.

Ask whether you both want children and what you expect from parenthood. Discuss how you would seek help if conception took longer than expected. Chapter 8 explores reproductive planning and fertility care.

Explore practical expectations around care. A partner may say they welcome children while assuming that the other will leave employment and carry almost every daily task. Another may imagine support from grandparents who have never agreed to provide it. Ask who would do what under realistic conditions,

including work, income, health, and location. These discussions concern responsibility and capacity, as well as affection for the idea of a family.

Where faith or cultural convictions influence contraception, family size, or sexual conduct, name those convictions and discuss their practical meaning. Neither person should assume that a shared religious label settles every question. If medical advice is needed, obtain it from a qualified practitioner. If theological guidance is requested, a leader should help the couple reflect without using spiritual authority to silence personal consent or conceal important disagreement.

A boundary should be heard without punishment. Someone may say that they do not wish to discuss a particular intimate detail or that they need professional support before continuing. Clarify whether enough relevant information remains available for a responsible decision. Respecting a boundary does not require proceeding towards marriage despite a fundamental unanswered question. It requires considering the limitation honestly without coercion or humiliation.

Family faith work and the place of authority

Some difficult questions concern who will have influence over the couple's home. Ask how each person expects parents, siblings, elders, pastors, and friends to participate in decisions. Family support can be valuable, and religious communities can

provide guidance and care. The issue is how that involvement will operate when the couple has a different preference or when relatives disagree with one another.

Discuss concrete decisions. Who would decide where the couple lives? Would relatives stay for extended periods without prior agreement? Could a parent demand private information about disagreements? Would either spouse consult a leader before discussing a concern with the other? Specific questions reveal arrangements that broad statements about honouring family or respecting spiritual authority may leave unclear.

Faith needs similarly concrete discussion. Ask about worship, membership, financial giving, prayer practices, and expectations for children's religious upbringing. A couple from the same denomination may still differ about the role of a pastor in personal decisions. A couple from different traditions may find a workable arrangement through honest planning. The important work is to understand the actual commitments rather than decide compatibility from a label alone.

Work and education also shape authority and opportunity. Would either person expect the other to decline promotion, stop study, or move whenever their own career requires it? How would competing opportunities be considered? In a fictional example, Patrick assumes that his employment always determines location because he earns more. Ruth expects both

careers to receive consideration, including periods when her opportunities are stronger. Their conversation needs to address the principle by which decisions would be made.

Relocation questions should include what the move would cost each person. One partner may leave a familiar language, professional network, family support, and independent income. The other may experience little comparable disruption. A fair discussion names this imbalance and explores support, access to resources, and ways to preserve choice. Optimism about married life should not obscure the practical dependence a move may create.

Listen especially to what happens when authority is questioned. A person may have a strongly held conviction and explain it respectfully. Threatening punishment for disagreement is a different matter. Premarital education should help people consider whether the proposed household permits honest participation. A home cannot be planned responsibly if one partner's task is to agree while the other's preferences remain beyond discussion.

Silence uncertainty and contradictory answers

Not every unanswered question signal dishonesty. Someone may need time to recall details, consult a document, consider an unfamiliar issue, or find suitable words. A person may also be uncertain about a future decision because the circumstances

genuinely remain unsettled. The couple should distinguish these possibilities from persistent evasion. The important question is whether there is a reasonable, agreed process for returning to the matter.

Respond to uncertainty with a practical next step. If someone does not know the remaining amount of a loan, they can obtain a statement. If future housing depends on employment, the couple can identify what is confirmed and what is still tentative. If a difficult family responsibility needs fuller discussion, they can arrange a suitable time. A temporary gap in information becomes less confusing when its relevance and proposed resolution are clear.

Contradictory answers require clarification. “Last month you said the business had no debts; today you mentioned a loan. Help me understand the difference” identifies the discrepancy without deciding its cause. There may be a misunderstanding, an omission, or deliberate concealment. Listen to the explanation and consider whether the facts can reasonably be checked where necessary. Do not force yourself to accept an account merely because questioning it feels uncomfortable.

Repeated postponement can become a significant fact about the process. A person may continually insist that everything will be explained after marriage. They may respond to each enquiry with anger, appeals to faith, or accusations that questions prove

disloyalty. The concern is then broader than the missing answer. The couple lacks a dependable way to establish shared understanding before commitment.

Avoid becoming an endless investigator. If a central claim remains unresolved despite appropriate opportunities, you may need to pause or stop. You do not have to establish a complete case proving deception before deciding that you lack sufficient confidence to marry. At the same time, uncertainty does not justify public accusations or spreading unverified allegations. A private decision can be made on the basis of what remains unknown.

Counsellors should document uncertainty accurately when records are appropriate. “The partners gave different accounts and have agreed to seek clarification” is more defensible than certifying a disputed account. Their responsibility is to support a fair process within competence. They should avoid allowing a scheduled wedding to convert unresolved matters into confident conclusions simply because everyone wants the preparation to appear complete.

When disclosure changes the decision

An honest answer may reveal something unexpected: a significant debt, a child whose existence was not previously known, a different intention about parenthood, or a responsibility that would shape where the couple lives. The

listener may feel hurt, frightened, or angry. Those reactions deserve space. The fact that disclosure is painful does not automatically show that the information should have remained hidden, nor does disclosure by itself require the relationship to continue.

Separate the new fact from the way it was handled. An existing responsibility may be manageable, while its deliberate concealment creates a serious question about trust. Conversely, a person may have disclosed something at an appropriate stage, and the other may still decide that the arrangement is incompatible with their own life. The couple needs to examine both the content and the process rather than collapsing them into a single judgement.

Avoid making an immediate promise while overwhelmed. “I need time to understand what this means” can be a responsible response. Identify what information or advice would help. A legal question may require a qualified adviser; a health issue may need a clinician; a practical burden may require realistic financial planning. Further reflection should have a purpose rather than becoming indefinite delay that neither partner understands.

Some differences can be addressed through clear agreements and feasible changes. Others involve commitments that a person cannot or should not simply abandon. A parent remains

responsible for a child's needs. Someone may hold a firm conviction about having no children. The couple should consider whether they can willingly accept the actual situation. Planning marriage around changing a partner's settled position invites avoidable misunderstanding.

Forgiveness and marriage are separate decisions. Within Christian practice, a person may choose to forgive an offence while still concluding that they cannot responsibly marry the offender. Rebuilding trust also requires more than an apology. The relevant questions include acknowledgement, corrected information, accountability, and conduct over time. The pastor must be careful not to make use of forgiveness language to force a marriage and rob the other person of his/her right to think again.

Disclosure must stay private except when there is a need for safeguarding. Do not publish private information to justify the decision to every relative. Families may receive a limited explanation that the couple has chosen not to proceed. Respectful separation can preserve dignity even when the decision follows a painful truth.

Recognising when shared discussion is unsafe

A conversation is unsafe when asking or answering exposes someone to threats, coercion, violence, or serious retaliation. A person may be afraid to mention debt because their partner has

threatened to harm them. Another may fear that a health disclosure will be broadcast publicly. Someone may agree with every answer in a joint session because they expect punishment afterwards. In these circumstances, communication advice alone cannot address the conditions under which speech occurs.

The World Health Organization's (2021) training curriculum teaches providers to listen, ask about needs, validate the person's experience, enhance safety and offer support. For a premarital guide receiving a disclosure, this points to a private, supportive response and an appropriate referral.

Avoid demanding immediate joint disclosure or reconciliation. Where intimidation or abuse is present, a shared session can give the threatening person additional information or opportunities to control the account. Appropriate specialist advice is needed before considering whether joint work is suitable. Speak privately where safe and appropriate, explain confidentiality and its limits, and help the person identify available support without making promises beyond your role.

Do not blame the person for failing to ask the perfect question earlier. Deception and abuse remain the responsibility of the person who commits them. Premarital education can provide useful opportunities to learn, but it cannot guarantee that harmful conduct will be revealed in advance. This difference becomes important when dealing with people who have already been

affected by some consequences because they require help rather than being told of the responsibility that could be known after things happen. Help should take into account the specific environment of the individual because an individual may need help from family members for accommodation purposes, does not have his/her own money, and fears community recognition. Such an approach would render the strategy unfeasible. Find out the specific alternatives with the help of capable local services. Counsellors, pastors, and parents should know their limits. They can listen to the individual, provide him/her advice which cannot lead to coercion and link him/her to some capable service provider. They should never do the work of criminal, clinical, and legal investigation. The aim is to help the person regain informed choice under safer conditions, including the freedom to decline or leave a proposed marriage.

Bringing the conversation into a responsible decision

After difficult discussions, review what has actually become clearer. A productive conversation may identify shared expectations, an agreement needing practical arrangements, or a difference that remains fundamental. Record these distinctions briefly if useful. Do not confuse the relief of having spoken with evidence that the issue has been resolved. A warm ending can restore closeness while leaving the central question unanswered.

For an agreement, ask what would make it feasible. If both intend to live independently from relatives, can they afford the housing? If one promises to repay a debt before marriage, what is the realistic plan? If both wish to continue education, how will time and costs be managed? Practical detail helps the couple recognise whether they share an achievable arrangement or only a reassuring aspiration.

For an unresolved difference, consider its significance. Some preferences allow flexibility; others shape the kind of life each person can freely accept. The next chapter will examine relational gaps and compatibility more fully. At this stage, the couple should avoid burying the difference under a promise that love will solve it. They need to know what each is willing to negotiate and what remains a genuine limit.

Guides can help without taking over. A pastor may explore the meaning of a conviction, a counsellor may facilitate careful discussion, and parents may provide relevant context. These contributions should strengthen the adults' ability to decide. The couple remains responsible for the promise they would make and the responsibilities they would undertake. A certificate of attendance cannot transfer that decision to the person who signed it.

Arrange another conversation when new information is needed, but keep the process purposeful. There is no requirement to

repeat every question until both give identical answers. Differences are part of knowing another person. What matters is whether they are understood honestly and whether the proposed marriage can accommodate them without coercion, concealment, or an unrealistic expectation of transformation.

Asking difficult questions is an act of preparation when it respects both truth and dignity. It gives affection a fuller understanding of the life under consideration. The eventual decision may be to proceed, to pause, or to part. Whatever the outcome, both people should have had an opportunity to speak relevant truth, hear the other person's position, and consider the consequences before commitment narrows their choices.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Identify one question you have avoided because you fear it may disturb the relationship. Rewrite it so that its purpose is clear and its wording does not assume wrongdoing.
2. Choose a word such as respect, support, submission, or partnership. Each partner should explain its practical meaning and give an example of a decision it would affect.
3. Prepare a conversation about one existing responsibility. Discuss what is known, what remains uncertain, who needs to be consulted, and which next step is appropriate.
4. Write a response to an unexpected disclosure that allows time for reflection without humiliating the speaker or promising a decision prematurely.
5. For pastors and counsellors, consider a couple in which one partner appears afraid to answer. What would help you avoid treating fear as a lack of communication skill?
6. Review an agreement the couple has made. What practical arrangements would make it possible, and which assumptions still need clarification?

The cases are fictional illustrations. These activities are educational prompts rather than diagnostic tools, a validated compatibility assessment, or a guarantee of marital safety or success.

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Chapter 6

Recognising Relational Gaps and Evaluating Compatibility

Compatibility concerns the life being proposed

Compatibility is the possibility of building a shared life that both people can willingly accept and responsibly sustain. It does not require identical personalities, family backgrounds, qualifications, or interests. It requires sufficient agreement about significant commitments and a workable way of handling differences. A couple may be attracted to each other and still want lives that cannot readily be combined. Recognising this before marriage gives both people more freedom to decide honestly.

Many prospective spouses begin by comparing visible features. They consider age, education, occupation, religious affiliation, nationality, and family reputation. These features can matter, but their meaning depends on the individuals and the proposed arrangement. Two people with similar qualifications may disagree fundamentally about authority within the home. Partners from different ethnic communities may share a clear understanding of mutual responsibility. A list of similarities cannot substitute for examining how a marriage would operate.

Consider a fictional couple, Bisi and Emmanuel. Both are graduates, active in church, and committed to supporting their parents. Their relatives describe them as well matched. Bisi expects that substantial household decisions will be discussed together. Emmanuel believes that his responsibility as husband gives him the final decision in every disagreement, even where Bisi would bear most of the consequences. Their visible similarities have not settled a central question about participation in married life.

Another fictional couple, Grace and Mwangi, differs in language, income, and social temperament. Grace enjoys large gatherings; Mwangi prefers smaller groups. They have nevertheless discussed how to maintain friendships, divide expenses, and make room for each person's preferences. Their differences create practical questions, but do not automatically make a shared life impossible. The issue is what the differences require and whether both can accept the resulting arrangements.

This chapter helps partners interpret what they have learned through the conversations in earlier chapters. It asks which differences are ordinary preferences, which need deliberate work, and which concern incompatible commitments or safety. These distinctions are educational aids, not a validated scoring system. They cannot predict an individual marriage with certainty. Their purpose is to prevent affection, prestige, or

public momentum from concealing the actual conditions of the proposed partnership.

For pastors, counsellors, and parents, the task is to help adults examine those conditions without taking over their choice. A decision to proceed should be informed. A decision to pause should have a purpose. A decision to part can acknowledge that two worthy people do not have a workable shared future under the circumstances they presently face.

Naming a relational gap accurately

The GAP Marriage Counselling Theory identifies differences in expectations, needs, meanings, interpretations and behaviour (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 3). Use these domains to locate the concern. Two partners may agree about who pays the rent, for example, while disagreeing about what financial contribution should entitle either person to decide.

A gap should be described through the positions involved. “We differ about family support” is a beginning. “I expect a fixed monthly contribution to relatives, while my partner expects to respond to every request without a prior limit” is more informative. The fuller description identifies the proposed arrangements and makes their consequences discussable. Without that precision, a couple may argue about whether they are generous while avoiding the household decision they need to make.

Distinguish a disagreement about meaning from a disagreement about action. Two partners may both support financial independence but use the phrase differently. One means retaining some personal spending money; the other means refusing any shared financial planning. Clarifying meaning may reduce the apparent disagreement or reveal that it is greater than expected. Either result is useful. Compatibility depends on the understood arrangement rather than agreement on an attractive word.

Some gaps concern capacity rather than intention. A person may sincerely wish to contribute to household costs while being unable to earn at present. Another may intend to provide care but face work hours that leave little available time. The couple needs to identify the limitation and consider feasible support. Calling the difficulty selfishness before understanding it can obscure the practical problem. Conversely, sincere intention does not supply resources that do not exist.

Manipulation, intimidation, sexual coercion and violence require a safety response. Treating abuse as a difference of preference can put pressure on the person harmed to reach a compromise. Chapter 7 explains when joint discussion is unsafe. Start your evaluation with the clear definition of the problem. What do the people desire or do? What facts support that? Who is affected? What remains uncertain? This foundation helps the

couple avoid both exaggerating a manageable difference and minimising a matter with substantial consequences.

Considering the weight of a difference

Differences carry different consequences. Disagreeing about the music played during a journey is unlikely to have the same significance as disagreeing about whether to have children. A preference that arises occasionally may require less adjustment than an expectation governing every household decision. The couple should therefore consider importance, frequency, practical effects, and the freedom available to each person rather than merely counting the number of disagreements.

Ask what living with the difference would mean on an ordinary day. If one partner expects frequent visitors and the other needs privacy to work from home, the issue may affect income, rest, and household relationships. The question is broader than sociability. If the difference concerns a wedding colour, its consequences may be limited to a particular event. Accurate evaluation follows the actual burden rather than the intensity of the first argument.

Consider whether the burden accumulates. Several apparently modest adjustments may all fall on the same person: changing churches, relocating, leaving employment, hosting relatives, and assuming unpaid care. Each may be discussed separately and described as a small sacrifice. Together they may transform one

partner's life while leaving the other's largely unchanged. Compatibility requires attention to the whole proposed arrangement, including cumulative demands.

Consider also whether the issue is reversible. Trying a different household schedule can be reviewed. A decision to abandon a professional qualification, transfer major assets, or move away from established support may have consequences that are harder to undo. More consequential decisions deserve clearer information and stronger practical preparation. Enthusiasm should not make every proposed change appear equally easy to reverse.

An important issue can be manageable if both understand it and accept a feasible arrangement. A less prominent issue can become serious if disagreement is met with contempt or punishment. The subject and the process therefore need separate attention. A couple may resolve an expense but reveal an unsafe pattern in how the decision is imposed. Reaching the requested outcome does not establish that the relationship permits fair participation.

Do not rely on a numerical threshold such as the number of matching answers required for marriage. A single incompatible commitment may outweigh numerous shared interests. Equally, many ordinary differences may coexist within a respectful partnership. The evaluator's question is qualitative: what life

would these positions produce, and can both people accept it without concealment, coercion, or an unrealistic expectation that the other will become someone else?

Core commitments and areas of flexibility

Some preferences can change without undermining a person's central commitments. Someone may prefer a particular neighbourhood but be willing to consider another if transport and safety are suitable. Other positions are central to the life the person is willing to undertake. A settled intention not to have children may be such a commitment. The couple needs to identify these distinctions honestly before negotiating an arrangement.

Wilde (2026a) describes a compromise exercise in which partners distinguish essential needs and values from areas where they can be flexible. Use it for disagreements that both people can discuss safely. Each person needs room to decline an arrangement they cannot accept.

Explore the reason beneath a preferred arrangement. A person who insists on living near a parent may be concerned about that parent's care. Another who objects may need access to employment rather than simply distance from relatives. Understanding these reasons can reveal options that the initial positions overlooked. Perhaps reliable care can be organised while the couple lives within reach of work. Such an option must

be feasible and genuinely acceptable, rather than invented to end an uncomfortable conversation.

Some reasons do not create an available middle position. One partner may want a permanently child-free life while the other considers parenthood essential. Having a child reluctantly is not a minor compromise, and hoping to change the other's mind after marriage is not an agreement. The couple may care deeply for each other while recognising that their commitments point towards different futures.

Review your own use of the word essential. Is the position connected to safety, conscience, identity, or a considered life commitment? Is it an inherited assumption you have never examined? Is it a preferred convenience that someone else would pay for? Reflection may reveal greater flexibility, but it should not become pressure to abandon a genuine limit. A counsellor can help explore the distinction without deciding what each person must value.

Agreement should leave both people able to describe what they have accepted and why. If one says yes only because the other threatens to end the relationship immediately, the resulting arrangement deserves scrutiny. Compromise involves a freely accepted adjustment. It should not require one partner to conceal resentment, surrender dignity, or tolerate harmful conduct to preserve the appearance of compatibility.

When difference creates a workable partnership

Different abilities and preferences can contribute to a shared life when the arrangement is welcomed by both partners. One may enjoy planning while the other is more comfortable responding to changing circumstances. One may have practical skills the other lacks. These differences can be useful, but they do not automatically create complementarity. The couple still needs agreement about responsibilities, recognition, and the right to learn or revise a role.

Consider a fictional couple, Chinedu and Mariam. Chinedu enjoys managing figures, while Mariam prefers organising practical household tasks. They initially agree that he will maintain their budget. The arrangement becomes problematic when he treats his budgeting role as authority to withhold information or veto every expense. The relevant difference concerns skills; the troubling development concerns power. A useful division of work should not remove Mariam's participation in decisions affecting her.

A workable partnership allows contribution without fixing identity permanently. Someone who cooks well should not automatically become responsible for every meal regardless of illness or workload. A confident speaker should not always speak on behalf of a quieter spouse. The quieter partner may have clear views that require space to be heard. Complementary

strengths are helpful when they expand capacity rather than excuse unequal entitlement.

Across three studies, Kluwer et al. (2020) found that a sense of connection was associated with more constructive responses to a partner's negative behaviour, particularly when people also felt free to act in line with their own values. In premarital reflection, ask whether the proposed relationship allows each person both closeness and a meaningful voice.

Ask whether each person can remain recognisable within the relationship. Can both maintain appropriate friendships, express a considered opinion, and pursue worthwhile interests? Can the couple change arrangements when circumstances change? These questions do not require isolated individualism or disregard for communal responsibilities. They examine whether commitment permits participation rather than demanding that one person disappear into the other's preferences.

Differences become workable through understood responsibilities, fair access to information, and realistic provision for change. Admiring the other person's strengths is a good beginning. The further task is to agree how those strengths will be used without placing either person beyond accountability. A marriage can benefit from difference when both people can contribute and both remain worthy of consideration.

Culture family and the meaning assigned to a gap

African couples live within varied family structures, languages, religious traditions, and economic circumstances. There is no single African expectation that determines what all partners should accept. Even within one ethnic community, households may practise family support, authority, hospitality, and ceremony differently. A couple should examine the particular expectations affecting them rather than treating broad cultural descriptions as instructions that cannot be questioned.

Family involvement can provide practical care and a sense of belonging. It may also introduce competing expectations. One family sees regular visits as normal affection, while another may see unexpected visits as ignoring their privacy in the home. One person may read a demand for prior notification as not accepting the family members, while another sees it as simple planning. It all lies in the behaviour and interpretation of behaviour.

The GAP model describes how people assess a relational difference in light of their experiences, identity and cultural meanings (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 5). Someone accustomed to making decisions alone may hear a request for consultation as mistrust. Ask what made the request feel threatening and consider what the partner actually asked for.

Yewande worries that the time and travel involved in Peter's extended family events will strain their household. Peter hears

this as opposition to his family. When he understands that she wants agreed limits, they can compare the time and money they can realistically contribute.

However, in other circumstances, there may be an underlying difference. For instance, where Peter feels his relatives should dictate everything and Yewande thinks joint household authority is important, explanations may not yield any result. The couple should not mistake understanding each other's positions for accepting them. Cultural significance can explain a commitment while leaving its compatibility with the other person's life unresolved.

Parents and elders can explain what they expect and distinguish a family custom from their own preferences. Religious leaders can help couples reflect on what faith requires in their circumstances. Ask who would carry the burden of an arrangement and whether both partners can freely accept it.

Readiness and conflicting goals

A couple may share the same goal while lacking a feasible plan for housing or needing to resolve an earlier marital obligation. A pause may give them time to address those practical issues. Where their goals conflict, first establish whether any arrangement would suit both people.

A readiness limitation has an identifiable relationship to the desired arrangement. Both people may wish to establish a separate household but need time to secure suitable accommodation. They can consider a budget, available income, and what must happen before moving. The plan may still fail because circumstances change, but its purpose is understandable. A pause becomes useful when it is connected to actual conditions rather than simply waiting for confidence.

An incompatible destination involves commitments that the couple cannot combine under an acceptable arrangement. One may intend to remain permanently in Nigeria while the other is unwilling to leave a settled life in Rwanda. Neither country is the problem. The difficulty is that both commitments may be firm and the couple has no mutually acceptable plan. A promise that distance will somehow solve itself does not address where their married life would occur.

Avoid classifying every disagreement as a readiness problem. “You will be ready to give up your career once we are married” assumes that a considered choice is temporary resistance. Likewise, “You will eventually want children” treats a settled position as an obstacle awaiting persuasion. The other person may change independently, but the marriage decision should use the position presently and honestly expressed.

Avoid also treating every practical limitation as proof of personal incompatibility. Modest income, disability, or a caregiving responsibility does not automatically prevent a worthwhile partnership. The couple needs to consider its specific resources, responsibilities, and chosen arrangement. Some circumstances require substantial support. Whether the partners can willingly undertake them is a different question from whether the person affected deserves love and respect.

An educational guide can ask whether the concern involves missing information, a capacity needing preparation, a negotiable arrangement, or incompatible commitments. These descriptions are not permanent labels for people. They organise the present decision. New information or genuine change can alter the evaluation, but a wedding should not be used as the mechanism expected to resolve what remains unclear or fundamentally opposed.

Evaluating promises through evidence of change

When a concern is raised, a partner may promise to change. The promise can be sincere and still require practical evaluation. A person who agrees to communicate more responsibly needs an understanding of what that would involve. Someone who wishes to manage spending differently needs a feasible plan and access to relevant information. Compatibility should not be judged

solely from the emotional relief produced by an apology or enthusiastic declaration.

Identify the behaviour rather than requesting a new personality. “Please tell me when plans involving me change” is clearer than “Become more considerate.” The first allows both people to understand what is being discussed and notice whether it occurs. The second may mean many things and leave progress dependent on subjective impressions. Specificity supports fair evaluation without turning the other person into an object under surveillance.

Consider who initiated the work and how it is sustained. Does the person acknowledge the concern when wedding approval is not immediately at stake? Do they take practical steps without requiring the other partner to organise everything? Can they discuss a setback honestly? Change may be uneven, but repeated denial and blame provide different evidence from responsible effort. The couple should examine the pattern without expecting perfection or excusing persistent harm.

Use ordinary opportunities to observe conduct. Do not create fake emergencies, recruit someone to tempt a partner, or secretly monitor devices. Such actions undermine the ethical basis of the relationship and may create misleading information. A couple can notice whether agreed financial discussions occur, whether consultation happens, or whether a planned responsibility is

undertaken. Relevant professional support may help where the concern exceeds educational guidance.

Time alone is insufficient. Six months of avoiding difficult subjects may offer less useful evidence than a shorter period of purposeful work. Equally, a few improved conversations cannot establish lasting change in a serious pattern. There is no universal observation period that certifies readiness. The importance and history of the concern, the circumstances in which conduct occurs, and appropriate professional advice should inform the process.

Violence, coercion, and threats require a different standard of care from an ordinary habit needing improvement. A prospective spouse should not be asked to remain exposed to harm while collecting evidence that the other person has changed. Specialist assistance and individual safety needs take priority. An apology does not oblige a person to marry, and hopeful accounts of change should never be used to remove that person's freedom to decide.

Designing an agreement that can be lived

A proposed solution needs to work beyond the counselling room. “We will communicate better” may express goodwill, but it does not describe how a particular decision will be handled. An agreement should identify the matter, the responsibilities involved, the resources needed, and how both people will know

whether the arrangement remains suitable. Its detail should match the importance of the issue rather than become a contract governing every ordinary interaction.

A couple planning to support relatives could agree on a regular contribution, how to discuss additional requests and what they will do in an emergency.

Flexibility becomes easier when both partners know the usual arrangement and what would justify an exception.

Check that the solution does not move the entire difficulty onto one person. If the proposal is that a woman leaves employment to resolve conflicting schedules, consider income, future opportunities, personal willingness, and alternatives. If a man is expected to fund every family request indefinitely, consider capacity and the assumptions beneath the demand. A superficially peaceful solution may depend on an unsustainable burden.

Consider whether relevant third parties have agreed to what is expected of them. A plan relying on a grandmother's childcare, an uncle's housing, or a sibling's financial contribution requires their actual consent. The couple cannot negotiate another person's labour or resources as if these were already available. Without confirmation, the arrangement remains a hope that needs an alternative.

Finally, allow review. Employment, health, caring responsibilities, and location can change after marriage. A workable agreement includes a way to reconsider responsibilities without treating every revision as disloyalty. This capacity matters alongside the original arrangement. Compatibility involves the proposed life and the couple's ability to address changes fairly as that life develops.

A purposeful pause before commitment

A pause can be responsible when it gives the couple time to clarify an important matter or undertake agreed preparation. Its purpose should be understood by both people. This might mean postponing the announcement of their marriage or delaying their move, among other things. It is important to determine what aspects need to be addressed and which will stay even when the break occurs.

Describe the problem without making any demands that ensure that the relationship continues. “I need us to clarify your current marital status before deciding about marriage” identifies a necessary condition for an informed decision. It does not promise that clarification will resolve every concern. Likewise, a person may request time to understand a responsibility without agreeing in advance to accept it.

Set a reasonable opportunity to review the position where appropriate. The review can consider what information has

become available, what work has occurred, and whether both still wish to continue. It should not become a deadline requiring someone to produce a preferred answer. Some matters depend on institutions or circumstances outside the couple's controlA broken date could lead to reconsideration rather than censure.

What does the delay mean for practice? Is the relationship meant to be exclusive now? Which wedding costs are no longer valid? How do you inform your family? What kind of contact feels right to each of you? It causes new pain if one party expects courtship to continue while the other feels like the relationship is over.

It helps if parents and preachers see delaying as an option. They should avoid announcing private concerns to the community or demanding that the couple proceed because money has been spent. The couple may need a brief explanation that arrangements are being reconsidered. Protecting privacy does not require pretending that every plan is settled.

A pause is less useful when it simply prolongs a fundamental disagreement that both people already understand. If neither can accept the other's settled commitment, further waiting may preserve hope without changing the proposed future. In an unsafe relationship, a negotiated pause may also be inappropriate or dangerous. Suitable support should guide

practical steps. The aim is informed freedom, not a universal requirement to wait before a person may leave.

Recognising fundamental incompatibility with dignity

Fundamental incompatibility can be acknowledged when the partners' essential commitments cannot be combined in a life both can freely accept. The conclusion does not establish that one person is defective. Two adults may differ about parenthood, permanent residence, religious practice, or the degree of participation expected in household decisions. Their reasons may be understandable while their proposed futures remain incompatible.

Do not demand a villain before allowing the relationship to end. A person may feel that separation is justified only if the other has committed a serious offence. This can encourage exaggeration of faults or prolong a relationship neither can realistically sustain. It is possible to say that the arrangement is unsuitable without declaring the other person unworthy of any marriage.

Consider a fictional couple, Fatou and David. Fatou intends to remain close to a dependent sibling and has a workable life in Senegal. David is firmly committed to permanent residence abroad and does not want a long-distance marriage. They discuss alternatives carefully but find none they can both accept. Their

affection does not remove the geographical conflict. Ending the courtship may honour their actual commitments more honestly than making promises each secretly hopes the other will abandon.

Separate social prejudice from incompatibility. Family opposition to an ethnic background, disability, previous divorce, or modest income should not automatically determine the couple's judgement. Examine the actual responsibilities, risks, convictions, and resources involved. A difference becomes relevant through its consequences for their proposed life, not simply because someone assigns lower status to one partner's identity.

Equally, do not use dignity as a reason to conceal harmful conduct. Where deception or abuse has occurred, accountability and safety may require appropriate assistance. A respectful approach need not produce equal responsibility for unequal behaviour. The language of incompatibility should not erase an offence or deny a person access to protection. Ordinary separation and response to harm may require different processes.

Parting without public humiliation

Ending a courtship can involve grief, disappointment, financial loss, and tension between families. The relationship may have carried hopes of companionship, children, migration, or social

belonging. A person can believe that ending it was responsible and still mourn what they hoped it would become. Support should permit that grief without treating sadness as evidence that the decision must be reversed.

Where safe, communicate the decision directly and plainly. “I have considered our plans and cannot accept the life we would be undertaking together” is clearer than repeatedly inventing excuses for avoiding meetings. The explanation should be sufficient to convey the decision without becoming an exhaustive prosecution of the other person's character. If direct contact creates risk, appropriate assistance and safer communication arrangements may be needed.

Consider practical obligations carefully. There may be deposits, possessions, joint acquisitions, and gifts which need to be sorted out. Where there is a disagreement, then legal advice should be sought because there are different responsibilities depending on the situation and location. It is not right to conclude that because one is disappointed they can keep the other person’s papers. A former courtship does not remove personal boundaries.

Families should resist turning the ending into a contest over honour. Statements that a person has disgraced an entire community can intensify pressure and expose private information. Relatives can be disappointed while responding with restraint. A brief account that the adults have decided not

to proceed is often enough for those outside the immediate process. More detail should be shared only for a clear, appropriate purpose.

Pastors and counsellors should avoid using a couple's story as an identifiable sermon illustration or training example without suitable permission. People who seek guidance should not discover that their private disclosures have become public teaching material. Any educational use should protect confidentiality and comply with applicable professional responsibilities. The need to explain a general lesson does not justify exposing the individuals involved.

After parting, encourage support that helps the person resume ordinary life. This may involve trusted friends, practical planning, and qualified care if distress becomes difficult to manage. Avoid prescribing an immediate return to courtship as proof of recovery. Each person needs time and freedom to reflect. A responsible ending can include learning without turning every painful experience into a permanent judgement about oneself or all future partners.

The responsibilities of pastors, counsellors and parents

Help the couple separate what they know from what they still need to clarify. Refer questions that require legal, clinical or safeguarding expertise to the appropriate professional.

A minister may feel confident about the match, a parent may welcome the relationship between the families, and a counsellor may recognise the couple's willingness to learn. The decision belongs to the prospective partners.

Use a formal assessment only for its intended purpose and within your training. The questions in this chapter can organise discussion about compatibility. Decisions still depend on the couple's circumstances and the issues the conversation brings to light.

Watch who speaks for the couple. If one person regularly changes their answer after the other shows disapproval, consider whether they have enough privacy and freedom to speak honestly.

Help the couple review the whole proposed life. Agreements about money, family care, work, faith, and residence may interact. A workable arrangement in one domain may create an excessive burden in another. Invite both people to describe what an ordinary week would look like under their combined plans. This can reveal practical contradictions that separate discussions have missed.

The appropriate outcome is a more informed decision, not a predetermined wedding. Sometimes the couple will proceed with clearer expectations. Sometimes they will pause for purposeful preparation. Sometimes they will part after

acknowledging a fundamental difference. Guides serve them best when each outcome can be considered without humiliation. Premarital education is valuable because it makes room for relevant truth while adults still have greater freedom to shape the commitment they are considering.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Describe one relational gap through each person's actual position. Avoid labels such as selfish, difficult, or incompatible until the arrangement and its consequences are clear.

2. Identify a core commitment and an area of flexibility for each partner. Discuss the reasons beneath each position without requiring a preferred answer.

3. Review the combined burden of the couple's plans. Which changes would each undertake in work, family responsibilities, residence, resources, and support?

4. Choose an agreed adjustment and identify practical evidence that it is occurring. Use ordinary observation and voluntary discussion rather than secret testing or surveillance.

5. Prepare a purposeful pause for a fictional couple. Identify what needs clarification, the practical arrangements during the pause, and how the position would be reviewed.

6. For guides, write a response to adults who conclude that their futures are incompatible. Does your response preserve dignity, confidentiality, and freedom to decide?

All cases are fictional illustrations. These prompts are educational aids, not diagnostic tools or a validated method for predicting a marriage. Concerns involving abuse, legal status, or clinical care require appropriate specialist assistance.

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Chapter 7

Practising Communication and Handling Conflict Safely

Learning how disagreement will be handled

Premarital preparation should help a couple practise how they will speak when their preferences differ. Pleasant conversation reveals something valuable about companionship, but it does not establish how disagreement will be handled. A couple needs opportunities to raise concerns, hear unwelcome information, consider requests, and decide what to do next. These experiences can inform their decision about marriage and prepare them for ordinary challenges within a shared household.

Communication includes more than expressing an opinion clearly. It involves whether both people can speak, whether information is understood, and whether the response permits further participation. A person may use polite words while making it clear that refusal will bring punishment. Another may speak hesitantly but offer thoughtful, honest information. The quality of communication should therefore be assessed through its conditions and effects as well as its fluency.

Consider a fictional couple, Kemi and Andrew. While planning a visit, Kemi asks that they discuss the cost before confirming accommodation. Andrew hears the request as criticism of his

judgement and immediately defends his generosity. Kemi then becomes sharper because her practical concern remains unanswered. The disagreement could be explored through their interpretations and responses, provided both are safe and willing. The original issue concerns an expense; the developing interaction concerns whether either feels heard.

Disagreement does not automatically indicate that a marriage should be abandoned. It may reveal an assumption that needs clarification or a skill that can be learned. Conversely, the absence of visible disagreement does not establish safety. One partner may remain silent because expressing a view has consequences. Preparation should give attention to the person's freedom to participate rather than rewarding a couple simply for appearing peaceful.

This chapter offers practical ways to begin a discussion, listen, regulate one's response, make a request, pause, repair, and review an agreement. The suggestions are educational practices, not a treatment protocol or a guarantee of marital success. They apply to situations in which communication can occur without intimidation. Where threats, coercion, or violence are present, safety and appropriate specialist assistance take priority over practising a shared conversation.

Pastors, counsellors, and parents can model the same discipline. They should listen carefully, avoid public humiliation, and

respect each adult's right to disagree. A couple learns something about responsible communication from the way preparation itself is conducted. Guidance that demands immediate agreement while dismissing questions teaches compliance more readily than it teaches mutual understanding.

Describing the interaction without distributing blame equally

Chapter 6 introduced the GAP framework for identifying differences. Here the focus is on what happens next: how each person interprets the difference, responds to it and may contribute to escalation in an ordinary disagreement (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapters 3–5).

Return to Kemi and Andrew's discussion. Kemi's question concerns affordability. Andrew interprets it as a claim that he is irresponsible. He argues that he knows how to make decisions. Kemi interprets his defence as dismissal and repeats the question more forcefully. If both can consider this account, they may identify a point at which clarification could have changed the direction: Andrew could ask whether Kemi is questioning the cost or his competence.

Describe actions concretely. One person raised their voice; another interrupted three times; a third issue was introduced before the first was answered. Such observations are easier to discuss than labels such as difficult or impossible. They also

leave room for correction. A partner may remember the event differently, and the couple can explore that difference without pretending that either observer has perfect access to every motive.

However, an interactional account does not make responsibility equal. If someone threatens violence after a reasonable question, the threat belongs to the person making it. The other person's discomfort or imperfect wording does not cause or justify abuse. Likewise, coercion should not be described as a protective response that a prospective spouse must manage more skilfully. Context may help explain conduct while leaving accountability intact.

Ask each person to identify a response within their own control. They may choose to clarify before assuming, wait until the other finishes, or request a pause before becoming insulting. The exercise should not require someone to accept responsibility for another adult's threats. Nor should it turn a person experiencing harm into the manager of the other person's emotions and behaviour.

For guides, the useful outcome is a clearer description that supports appropriate action. Sometimes that action is a manageable communication practice. Sometimes it is further clarification about compatibility. Sometimes it is individual support and referral. A diagram or theory cannot decide which

response is suitable without attention to the facts and the conditions under which both people participate.

Beginning a concern with clarity and respect

The opening of a discussion can make its purpose easier or harder to understand. A broad attack on character invites an argument about identity. A specific concern gives the other person a clearer opportunity to respond. “You have no respect for me” may express real pain but leaves the event undefined. “You confirmed a visit involving me before we had agreed on the date” identifies what needs discussion.

Wilde (2026b) describes how to open a difficult conversation by naming a specific observation, how it affected you and what you need. Use this approach in ordinary disagreements where both people can speak safely.

Explain what happened and why it matters. “When the visit was confirmed, I had already committed to work. I felt overlooked, and I need us to consult before making plans that involve both of us.” This statement contains an observation, an effect, and a request. It is more informative than a sweeping judgement. The listener can clarify the circumstances and consider the requested change.

Using the word I does not automatically make a statement respectful. “I feel that you are selfish and incapable of love” remains a character attack. A feeling such as disappointment or

anxiety should be distinguished from a judgement about another person's entire nature. At the same time, naming a specific harmful act directly is appropriate. Clear accountability should not be removed in an effort to sound agreeable.

Choose a suitable moment where possible. If someone is driving, managing an urgent task, or exhausted, ask when a meaningful discussion can occur. Timing should help the concern receive attention rather than become an endless reason to postpone it. The person asking needs a reasonable opportunity to return to the matter. An important issue cannot be managed if every available time is declared unsuitable.

Couples can practise with ordinary, manageable topics before approaching highly sensitive matters. They might discuss punctuality, a planned expense, or how to organise a visit. Practising does not require manufacturing conflict. The aim is to learn whether a concern can be raised clearly and answered honestly while both people remain able to express their views.

Listening before explaining your position

Listening during disagreement requires resisting the urge to answer before the concern is understood. A person may hear one sentence and begin preparing a defence while the partner continues speaking. The response then addresses an assumed accusation rather than the actual issue. Allow the speaker to complete a manageable account, and ask for clarification when

necessary. The listener can explain their own position afterwards.

Summarise the concern in plain language. “You are worried that an unplanned visit would interfere with work, and you want us to agree before confirming dates.” Ask whether that summary is accurate. This practice can reveal an important misunderstanding early. It also shows the speaker which parts were heard. A summary should be concise enough to invite correction rather than become a speech that replaces the person's account.

Acknowledge an understandable effect without pretending agreement about every fact. “I can understand why that arrangement felt sudden” is different from admitting an intention you did not have. Understanding the partner's experience does not require surrendering your own account. The couple can distinguish what occurred, how it was experienced, and what was intended. Those questions may produce different answers that still need discussion.

Avoid moving immediately into advice. If a partner describes exhaustion, the first useful response may be to understand its source rather than announce a solution. Ask whether they want you to listen, help think through options, or participate in a practical task. A person can welcome support while rejecting a

proposed solution. Their refusal does not necessarily mean that they are determined to remain unhappy.

Listening must be reciprocal over the conversation. One person should not carry the permanent role of listener while their own concerns receive no attention. After understanding the first account, invite the other position. Where both are willing, taking turns can help prevent interruption. This is a practical arrangement rather than a rigid rule requiring the same number of minutes for every contribution.

Do not equate listening with enduring humiliation. Repeated insults, threats, or degrading statements do not become acceptable because someone needs to express emotion. A person may set a boundary and seek support. The aim is to understand relevant meaning while preserving dignity, not to remain indefinitely available for harmful treatment under the label of empathy.

Tone gestures and silence

People communicate through voice, pace, posture, facial expression and silence. The meaning of these signals depends on the person and the situation.

In Managing Conflicts Without Violence, Adetunji (2025b, Chapter 7) discusses interpreting body language in context. Treat a gesture as a reason to ask a courteous question before drawing a conclusion.

A person may look away while thinking, showing respect, managing discomfort or coping with sensory demands. Ask what the person is experiencing before drawing conclusions about their attention or intentions.

Raised volume may mean something different across families, yet its effect on the listener still matters. Avoid deciding that a single gesture has one universal interpretation. Ask how the person understands their own response and explain its effect where relevant.

Consider a fictional couple, Ayo and Rehema. Ayo expects direct eye contact during serious conversations. Rehema looks away when concentrating and was taught that prolonged eye contact with authority figures could appear challenging. Ayo initially interprets her behaviour as evasion. Once they discuss the difference, they can consider ways to confirm attention without demanding that Rehema perform a gesture that feels unnatural.

Silence also requires care. It may be a short pause to think, difficulty finding words, a deliberate refusal to engage, or fear of consequences. These possibilities should not be collapsed into one judgement. Ask whether the person needs time or a different way to communicate. If they indicate fear, do not insist that better confidence alone will solve it. The conditions of the relationship may need separate attention.

Notice your own signals. Rolling your eyes, laughing at a concern or crowding the other person can feel dismissive or intimidating. If a partner describes that effect, listen and consider what you can change.

Ask before using touch to comfort someone during conflict and respect their answer. Leave the other person space to move away and end the conversation.

Responding to emotion with accountability

Emotions provide information about a person's experience, but they do not dictate what the person may do to another. Anger may signal frustration, unfairness, fear, or disappointment. Anxiety may reflect uncertainty or a remembered injury. The useful task is to notice the experience, understand the concern where possible, and choose a response that preserves safety and participation. Feeling strongly does not create permission to threaten or humiliate.

Recognise early signs that your ability to listen is becoming limited. You may notice faster speech, difficulty following the other person's account, an urge to interrupt, or a repeated mental rehearsal of accusations. These observations need not become a diagnosis. They can simply prompt a slower response, a request for clarification, or a pause. The aim is to act before the conversation becomes more harmful.

Simple practices may help during ordinary tension. Stop speaking briefly, place attention on the present setting, take a comfortable breath, or drink water. Choose what feels manageable rather than insisting that everyone use the same technique. Some people find body-focused exercises uncomfortable. These suggestions are educational aids and should not be offered as treatment for trauma, panic, or another clinical difficulty.

Take responsibility for your own response. “I am becoming too angry to listen properly, and I need a pause” is clearer than “You are making me lose control.” The first statement identifies a limitation and an action. The second transfers responsibility to the partner and may imply that further disagreement will justify harm. Each adult remains accountable for what they choose to do with their emotion.

Empathy can recognise strain while retaining a boundary. A partner may have slept poorly, faced a demanding workday, or received distressing news. These circumstances can inform the timing and support offered. They do not erase the need to apologise for an insult or stop threatening conduct. Context helps people respond intelligently; it should not become a permanent exemption from responsibility.

If emotional difficulties repeatedly disrupt daily functioning or the person struggles to manage harmful impulses, suitable

professional assistance may be needed. A prospective spouse cannot be expected to provide treatment or constant monitoring. Premarital preparation can identify support needs, but the decision about marriage should not rest on the promise that living together will automatically resolve them.

Pausing a conversation and returning responsibly

A pause can help an ordinary disagreement when one or both people can no longer participate constructively. It works best when the couple has discussed its meaning in advance. The person requesting it should explain that the conversation is stopping temporarily and, where appropriate, suggest a realistic opportunity to return. Otherwise, the pause may be experienced as abandonment or become a method of avoiding every difficult issue.

For example, “I want to discuss this, but I am not listening well now. Can we stop and speak again after dinner?” identifies intention, limitation, and a proposed return. The other person can consider whether the timing is suitable. There is no universal interval that guarantees readiness. What is important is being provided with sufficient time to be able to participate productively again without leaving the problem hanging forever unsolved.

While on the pause, do not use messages to continue the quarrel, follow your partner from one room to another, and insist on an

instant response. Spend some time on calming down and thinking about what needs to be cleared up. Insulting your partner or finding someone who can attack him/her may make your next conversation even more heated.

Coming back does not mean starting from where you left off. First of all, it means recognising the problem and admitting your mistakes. Ask whether both are ready to continue. If the proposed time becomes impractical, communicate and agree another opportunity where possible. Repeated failure to return can reveal a process problem that deserves attention. A person cannot participate fairly if their concerns are always left unfinished.

The right to stop does not depend on permission from a threatening partner. If someone is frightened or unsafe, they may need to seek assistance rather than negotiate a return. A safety response should not be confused with the ordinary communication pause described here. A person should not be told to promise another private meeting when doing so may expose them to harm.

Guides should also avoid requiring every disagreement to be resolved before sleep or before leaving the counselling room. Fatigue and pressure can produce superficial agreement or further escalation. A thoughtful return may be more useful than a rushed conclusion. At the same time, a pause should not be

used to prevent needed decisions. The couple needs both space to regulate and a dependable process for addressing the issue.

Making requests that permit an honest answer

A request states what you would like the other person to do while leaving room for a genuine response. A demand treats refusal as unacceptable and may attach punishment to it. The words can sound similar, so consider what happens when the answer is no or when the person proposes an alternative. Respectful communication requires more than placing please at the beginning of a non-negotiable instruction.

Be specific about the desired action. “Could we agree before inviting someone to stay overnight?” is clearer than “Care more about this home.” Explain why the request matters, especially where the partner may not understand its consequences. A request about advance notice might concern privacy, workload, cost, or rest. Identifying the reason makes it easier to consider an alternative that addresses the actual need.

The listener should answer the request rather than argue only about the speaker's emotion. “I did not mean to upset you” may be true but does not settle how visits will be arranged. A useful response could acknowledge the concern, explain any limitation, and propose a workable practice. The aim is an understood decision, not merely reassurance that the relationship remains affectionate.

Separate the request from a personal boundary. “Please avoid insulting me” asks for a change. “I will stop this conversation if insults continue” describes an action the speaker can take, provided it is feasible and safe. Boundaries should not be framed as threats designed to control unrelated conduct. They identify the conditions under which a person will participate or the steps they need to protect themselves.

Expect some requests to remain incompatible with the other person's commitments. A partner may decline relocation, a particular financial arrangement, or an expectation about parenthood. Clear communication does not require them to accept. The couple then needs to evaluate the difference as discussed in Chapter 6. Improving the wording should not become an endless campaign to obtain consent that the person does not wish to give.

For parents and pastors, the same distinction matters. Advice can be offered with reasons while leaving the adults free to decide. Using spiritual status, family loyalty, or financial support to impose a marriage choice undermines the process. A couple should learn that a respectful answer may include disagreement, and that a relationship can be evaluated honestly without treating every refusal as rebellion.

Repair after a hurtful exchange

Repair involves addressing harm in the interaction and creating conditions for a more responsible next step. It can begin during a discussion when someone notices that their words have become unfair. “That accusation was too broad. Let me explain the particular event” acknowledges the problem and attempts to change course. The other person may welcome the correction while still needing attention to the hurt it caused.

An apology should identify the action rather than merely regret the partner's reaction. “I interrupted and mocked your concern about money” is clearer than “I am sorry you became upset.” The first recognises conduct for which the speaker is responsible. The second can leave the impression that the real problem was the listener's sensitivity. A useful apology also avoids attaching a justification that transfers responsibility back to the person harmed.

Listen to how your conduct affected the other person and allow them time to respond. In Christian counselling, give people room to decide whether they wish to forgive, reconcile or continue the relationship. Each decision belongs to the person making it.

Choose a corrective action that fits the harm. If you shared private information, stop circulating it and seek advice on limiting further disclosure. If you broke a promise, explain what you can realistically do now and follow through.

Look for sustained change in ordinary interactions. Where there is abuse, seek specialist support and prioritise safety.

Repair also includes accepting that an issue may remain unresolved. The couple can stop treating each other disrespectfully while still disagreeing about a proposed arrangement. Restored courtesy is valuable, but it does not establish compatibility. The next step may be further planning, a pause, or a decision not to proceed. Communication skills should help the truth become clearer rather than make every outcome appear settled.

Moving from discussion to a practical agreement

A constructive discussion should clarify what happens next. Some conversations concern understanding rather than an immediate decision, but practical issues eventually require action. Identify the original concern, the arrangement both have accepted, and any outstanding information. The couple should be able to describe the agreement in comparable terms. Otherwise, a peaceful ending may conceal two different expectations about what was decided.

Consider a fictional couple, Mumbi and Femi, discussing how often to visit relatives. Mumbi thinks they have agreed to discuss each invitation before accepting. Femi thinks they have agreed that either may accept, provided the other is informed afterwards. Their conversation has ended warmly, but the

practical difference remains. A short summary would help reveal it before the next invitation creates another conflict.

Make a commitment that fits both schedules. For instance, agree on a shorter call if an hour each night would interfere with work or caregiving. Decide how you will let each other know when an agreed arrangement needs to change.

Assign responsibilities clearly where appropriate. If the couple agrees to obtain information about accommodation, decide who will enquire and how the information will be reviewed. Avoid allowing the more organised partner to become responsible for every follow-up by default. A shared decision can involve different tasks while still requiring contribution and access to the relevant facts from both people.

Review the result through ordinary experience. Did the arrangement address the concern? Did it create a burden that was overlooked? Does it need adjustment? Reviewing should not become a search for faults or an opportunity to change the agreement unilaterally. It is a way of learning whether the plan works under actual conditions. The couple should preserve freedom to raise a new concern without being accused of ingratitude.

Some discussions reveal that no acceptable agreement is available. Record that honestly rather than writing a reassuring conclusion for the sake of a counselling certificate. A guide may

help clarify the difference and appropriate next steps, but cannot manufacture mutual consent. The value of preparation includes identifying limitations before a wedding, even when the result disappoints those who hoped for a different decision.

Digital communication and disagreements across distance

Text messages can support contact while also leaving tone and timing unclear. A brief reply may reflect work demands rather than indifference. A delayed response may result from connectivity, sleep, or another responsibility. These possibilities should be clarified before assigning motive. Equally, persistent avoidance of important discussions should not be excused automatically as a technical problem. The couple needs a dependable way to address significant matters.

Agree on realistic expectations for ordinary contact. Discuss working hours, time differences, available privacy, and what counts as an urgent message. A partner should not be required to remain continuously available online to prove affection. The arrangements should permit both connection and ordinary life. If a plan changes, a brief explanation can reduce unnecessary uncertainty without requiring constant reporting of location or activity.

When a message seems hurtful, consider asking for clarification before extending the argument. “I am unsure how you meant that

sentence. Can we discuss it when you are available?" creates room to understand. Some subjects may be easier by voice or video if both have privacy and feel comfortable. Changing the channel does not guarantee honesty or safety, but it can allow a fuller exchange than a series of hurried texts.

Avoid forwarding private messages to relatives or church groups as a way to win a disagreement. Public exposure can create additional harm and make honest communication more difficult. Relevant communications may need to be preserved or shared with appropriate professionals where safety or legal matters arise. That is a different purpose from recruiting a public audience to shame a partner.

Digital boundaries matter during and after courtship. Do not demand passwords, install tracking software, repeatedly contact someone who has asked you to stop, or threaten to circulate intimate material. These acts should not be presented as ordinary expressions of jealousy that a spouse must accommodate. They call for appropriate support and attention to safety, including specialist advice where abusive monitoring or threats are involved.

For a long-distance couple, review whether difficult matters are actually discussed or repeatedly displaced by cheerful messages. Warmth can coexist with unresolved disagreement. Reserve some time for deliberate talk and reflect upon it. Instead of

considering constant communication as an indication that all the future plans have been established, the two individuals need to assess the knowledge and freedom they got through their communication.

Recognising abuse during disagreement

Regular disagreements include different ideas or desires, and people are able to talk about them without fear of any sort of punishment. In case of abuse, there might be threats, intimidation, sexual or physical abuse, or any behaviour limiting a person's freedom and safety. An apparently calm relationship can still contain serious harm. The distinction cannot be established simply by measuring how loudly the couple argues or whether both appear polite in a meeting.

Ask whether both people can decline a request, disagree about a plan, seek support, and leave a conversation safely. Consider whether one controls essential resources, monitors contact, or uses private information as leverage. Such questions require appropriate competence and privacy, especially where disclosure could bring retaliation. A pastor or parent should avoid conducting an improvised joint investigation that makes the person afraid more exposed.

The World Health Organization’s (2021) training curriculum teaches healthcare providers to listen, ask what the person needs,

validate their experience, improve safety and offer support. Premarital guides who receive a disclosure should focus on immediate safety and an appropriate referral.

Do not instruct the person experiencing abuse to speak more gently as the solution. Clear communication may be useful in many relationships, but it cannot make the victim responsible for preventing another person's violence. Do not prescribe a private confrontation, family reconciliation meeting, or ordinary joint counselling where coercion or violence makes that process unsafe. Seek appropriate specialist advice about what assistance is suitable.

Practical support should fit actual circumstances. A person may lack independent income, transport, housing, or confidential access to services. Trusted contacts and local support options need careful consideration, particularly if someone is being monitored. Qualified services can help with safety planning. In immediate danger, urgent assistance through appropriate local emergency channels takes priority over completing premarital education or discussing whether a wedding can continue.

Take statements about suicide, serious self-harm or killing another person seriously. For an immediate risk of suicide or self-harm, the World Health Organization (2026) advises seeking urgent help through emergency or crisis services. Obtain assistance appropriate to the threat and avoid promises of

secrecy that prevent you from doing so. If a threat is used to pressure someone into marriage, seek help for the danger and respect that person's freedom to decide.

Practising skills without turning the couple into performers

Premarital education can include brief practice with an ordinary topic, provided both people are safe and willing. One person states a concern, the other summarises what they heard, and both clarify the next step. The purpose is to support learning rather than demonstrate an ideal relationship for the facilitator. A polished performance in a session does not establish what occurs privately or prove that every significant issue has been addressed.

Choose a topic that does not expose highly sensitive information in a group. Planning a visit or discussing a manageable expense may be suitable. Questions about trauma, health, suspected abuse, or disputed legal status require a different level of privacy and competence. Adults should be able to decline a role-play without being publicly judged as uncooperative or unready for marriage.

Give feedback on observable conduct. "You allowed the explanation to finish and checked your summary" identifies a useful practice. "You are clearly an excellent husband" makes a prediction the exercise cannot support. If the participant

interrupted, invite them to try again with a shorter response. Keep feedback manageable so that the couple can practise one change rather than attempt to remember an entire lecture while speaking.

The guide should attend to the setting. Can everyone hear? Does either person need more time, a different language, or another way of participating? Avoid assuming that eye contact, eloquence, or quick answers indicate greater commitment. Communication styles and access needs vary. The relevant goal is understood participation, not conformity to a preferred performance style.

Invite individual reflection after practice. What was easier than expected? What remained difficult? Did either person agree because they felt observed or pressured? The answers can inform further preparation. Where fear emerges, do not simply assign more practice. Appropriate individual discussion and specialist assistance may be required. Participation should not create a new occasion for intimidation after the session. Continue learning through real, ordinary decisions. Notice whether concerns can be raised, whether agreements are understood, and whether repair involves responsible action. The next chapter will apply preparation to health, intimacy, work, money, and parenthood. Communication supports that work when it helps both people understand the proposed life and make decisions freely. Its value

lies in what it makes possible, including the honest recognition that a relationship should pause or end.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Rewrite a broad criticism as a specific observation, an explanation of its effect, and a clear request. Check that the request permits an honest answer.
2. Practise summarising a manageable concern before explaining your own position. Ask the speaker what you understood accurately and what you missed.
3. Describe how you usually show tension. Discuss what clarification or space helps, without expecting your partner to diagnose or manage you.
4. Agree how an ordinary communication pause would work, including a realistic return. Distinguish that arrangement from steps needed when someone is unsafe.
5. Write an apology that identifies conduct, recognises its effect, and offers a relevant corrective action without demanding immediate forgiveness.
6. For pastors, counsellors, and parents, explain why a threatening relationship should not be handled merely by asking both people to improve their communication.

7. Review a fictional online disagreement. Identify which assumptions about tone or timing need clarification and which behaviours require attention to boundaries or safety.

Cases are fictional illustrations. The exercises are educational practices, not diagnostic tools or a validated treatment protocol. Do not use them to require joint disclosure or shared practice where coercion, violence, or retaliation makes participation unsafe.

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Chapter 8

Preparing for Health Intimacy Work Money and Parenthood

Preparing for an ordinary week of married life

Marriage preparation needs to move beyond what the couple believes to how their proposed life would operate. Health appointments require time and transport. Paid work affects availability for household tasks. Caring for relatives influences money and rest. Parenthood, where desired and possible, introduces further responsibilities. These areas should be considered together because an arrangement that appears manageable in one conversation may become unrealistic when combined with everything else.

Imagine an ordinary week rather than only the wedding or honeymoon. Where would each person wake up? How would they reach work? Who would obtain food, clean, manage appointments, and respond to a dependent relative's needs? When would they spend time together or rest separately? This exercise can reveal assumptions that remain hidden in broad promises to love, provide, or support. The purpose is realistic preparation, not control of every hour.

Adetunji (2026b, Chapter 4) places marriage within a wider set of decisions, routines and social relationships in Preventive Life

Design. Start by planning an ordinary week and consider how one commitment, such as shift work, affects the others.

Consider a fictional couple, Nkiru and Isaac. They plan to work full time, host relatives frequently, support two households financially, and have a child soon after marriage. They expect Nkiru to organise meals and most daily care because she is considered naturally capable. Each plan initially receives enthusiastic agreement. When they examine the combined week, they discover that her expected workload leaves little room for rest, paid work, or her own needs.

Their preparation should now address the arrangement rather than praise her willingness to sacrifice. Which commitments are essential? Which can be shared, reduced, or delayed? What help is genuinely available? Isaac's contribution may involve time and practical tasks as well as income. Nkiru should be able to revise an agreement made before its full consequences were understood. Responsible planning allows an informed response to the actual burden.

This chapter offers ways to prepare without assuming that every couple has abundant money, reliable services, or complete freedom from structural pressures. Some households face difficult limits. Naming those limits makes planning more honest and helps identify support. It should not turn poverty, illness, or disability into a judgement about personal worth.

Health information that supports practical care

Relevant health information helps a couple understand present needs and future responsibilities. The conversation should concern how daily life may be affected, what support is welcome, and which professional guidance is needed. A person's health history is not a complete description of who they are. Nor should a diagnosis be treated as an automatic verdict on whether they can marry or contribute meaningfully to a household.

Where an ongoing condition is involved, discuss practical arrangements with the person's participation. There may be appointments, accessible housing needs, limitations during episodes of illness, or expenses that should be included in planning. Ask what the individual already manages effectively and what assistance they would find useful. Avoid assuming total dependence or, at the opposite extreme, expecting them to continue every responsibility regardless of their health.

Suitable healthcare professionals should advise on screening relevant to the individuals, their circumstances, and any reproductive plans. They can explain what a test measures, how results should be interpreted, and whether follow-up is needed. Do not assemble a universal list of tests and promise that completing it removes future risk. Results answer particular questions within limits; they do not certify freedom from every illness or guarantee a particular outcome in marriage.

Privacy should be planned before information is shared. The couple may need to understand a relevant condition without giving relatives access to full records. A pastor or counsellor should consider whether seeing a laboratory report serves a necessary purpose within their role. Where disclosure may expose someone to harm, specialist assistance may be needed. A wedding preparation requirement should not become an excuse for coercive testing or public exposure.

A shared care plan can remain simple. Identify the usual source of healthcare, how appointments would be reached, likely costs, and who may be contacted with the person's agreement. Keep essential information accessible to its owner. If relocation is proposed, check how appropriate care would continue at the destination through current official information and qualified guidance. Optimism about moving should not obscure an interruption in necessary support.

The plan should preserve the person's agency. A spouse may accompany them when invited, help with practical tasks, or participate in agreed discussions. Marriage does not make one adult the automatic owner of another's health information or decisions. Support works best when it is informed, welcome, and clear about responsibilities rather than based on assumptions of control.

Understanding inherited conditions without stigma

Questions about inherited conditions arise frequently in premarital preparation, particularly where families are concerned about sickle cell disease. These questions need accurate information and competent interpretation. They should not be answered through appearance, family reputation, or an old result whose meaning is uncertain. The couple should use appropriate healthcare services and consider genetic counselling where relevant to their circumstances and reproductive plans.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) distinguishes sickle cell trait from sickle cell disease. People with the trait can pass the gene to their children. A healthcare provider or genetic counsellor can explain what each person's results mean for their reproductive plans.

Avoid simplistic statements that confuse being a carrier with having a disease. Equally, do not dismiss inheritance questions because the adults feel healthy. Relevant information may matter for reproductive planning even when a person has no current symptoms. A qualified professional can explain the significance of the findings and the options available. This chapter does not interpret an individual laboratory result or direct a couple towards a particular reproductive choice.

The process should remain voluntary and respectful. A carrier result does not make someone morally responsible for their

inherited characteristics. A person living with sickle cell disease is not a warning label or an unsuitable human being. Prospective partners need honest information about practical and reproductive implications while retaining dignity and freedom to decide. Families should avoid public announcements that expose sensitive information as evidence against a match.

Where results need clarification, obtain appropriate confirmation rather than changing decisions on the basis of an unverified message. The couple should understand who performed the test, what was measured, and whether a professional considers further assessment necessary. Relevant differences in haemoglobin findings require more care than an informal comparison of two letters. Avoid relying on a religious leader or introducer to interpret a medical question beyond their competence.

If the information creates a difficult decision, allow time for reflection with suitable support. The couple may need to consider health needs, available services, costs, convictions, and reproductive preferences. Their decision should not be reduced to obedience to a family command or proof that affection can overcome every risk. Informed consent involves understanding consequences and alternatives without being promised certainty that no professional can provide.

Mental wellbeing everyday habits and support

Preparation for mental wellbeing begins with understanding ordinary functioning and the support each person already uses. What helps them manage demanding work, loss, uncertainty, or periods of distress? Who can they speak with beyond the relationship? Do they need ongoing professional care? These questions should support practical planning rather than invite a prospective spouse to diagnose personality or decide that a health history defines someone's character.

Discuss the place of rest in the proposed household. Work hours, commuting, noise, visitors, digital contact, and care responsibilities can compete with sleep and time to recover. A couple may agree that rest matters while designing a schedule that makes it unlikely. Consider the actual conditions: shared rooms, irregular shifts, limited transport, or responsibilities that cannot simply be abandoned. The next step is to look for feasible adjustments and available support.

Household habits should be discussed without moral superiority. Food preferences, physical activity, alcohol use, smoking, and use of medicines or supplements may affect shared routines and resources. Where there is a health concern, seek suitable clinical advice rather than prescribing a treatment through marriage counselling. A partner's concern does not justify confiscating

medication or requiring someone to stop prescribed care to demonstrate faith or trust.

Where professional care is already involved, discuss continuity through marriage and relocation. The individual can decide what information to share and what role a spouse may appropriately play. A practical plan might involve appointments, access to services, and agreed help during difficult periods. The spouse should not be assigned the role of clinician or made solely responsible for preventing every episode of distress.

Support should have more than one source where possible. Friends, family, community, professional services, and personal routines may contribute differently. A marriage that requires someone to abandon all external support can increase dependence and make difficulties harder to disclose. Suitable support networks need boundaries and confidentiality, but they need not disappear because a person has married.

If distress becomes severe or there are threats of suicide, self-harm, or harm to others, use appropriate professional or emergency assistance rather than relying on the household plan alone. Chapter 7 addresses these concerns more directly. For ordinary preparation, the aim is a realistic understanding of needs and resources, coupled with the freedom to seek help. Marriage can include meaningful care without becoming a promised cure for every emotional difficulty.

Intimacy as a respectful and continuing relationship

Intimacy involves being known, expressing affection, sharing vulnerability, and relating physically in ways that both people freely welcome. It cannot be reduced to performance or a fixed obligation to satisfy another person's expectation. A couple should discuss what closeness means to them, how they express comfort, and how they would communicate a limit. These discussions can be conducted with dignity without requiring explicit accounts of private sexual experiences.

A working definition published by the World Health Organization (n.d.-a) links sexual health with physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing, and with freedom from coercion and violence. In premarital education, discuss consent and comfort alongside health information.

Expect differences in how affection is expressed and experienced. One person may welcome frequent touch; another may need more personal space or time before physical closeness. Neither preference automatically indicates lack of love. Discuss what is comfortable, what has changed, and whether suitable professional help is needed for a concern. Do not use shame or comparison with other couples to force a preferred response.

Sexual concerns such as pain, persistent distress, or difficulty with functioning deserve qualified healthcare assessment where appropriate. Avoid interpreting them automatically as rejection,

spiritual failure, or proof of unfaithfulness. Likewise, avoid prescribing medicines, herbs, or performance products through a counselling session. The couple can seek accurate advice and consider support while retaining privacy and consent.

Faith convictions should be discussed in practical terms. A couple may share a belief about sexual conduct before marriage yet need further preparation for expectations after marriage. Religious guidance can help them reflect on care, fidelity, and responsibility. It should not silence questions about consent or portray discomfort as disobedience. Pastors can support learning while referring clinical matters to suitable professionals.

Intimacy changes with circumstances, including illness, fatigue, work, ageing, and caregiving. The couple should prepare for continuing conversation rather than promise an unchanging pattern. Affection can remain meaningful when a preferred form of closeness is unavailable. The important skill is to communicate needs and limits without treating another person's body as a resource to which one has unrestricted access.

Reproductive plans and informed healthcare choices

Reproductive preparation involves the couple's hopes about having children, timing, spacing, and the responsibilities they are willing to undertake. Begin with what each person actually wants. Do not assume that a wedding announcement settles these

questions or that a partner's stated position will change once relatives expect a grandchild. A meaningful agreement needs honest intentions and recognition that reproductive outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Where pregnancy is intended, seek appropriate preconception advice from qualified healthcare professionals. They can consider personal history, medicines, relevant screening, and other individual needs. This book does not prescribe a medical programme. Its role is to encourage informed preparation and avoid replacing professional advice with hearsay, spiritual assurances, or a generic set of instructions applied to every person.

Where a couple wishes to delay or avoid pregnancy, discuss their preferences and seek reliable clinical guidance about suitable options. Decisions should consider individual circumstances and informed consent. Do not select a method for a partner without their participation, interfere with contraception, or use pregnancy as a way to secure commitment. Reproductive choices require respect for the people whose bodies and lives would be affected.

Discuss costs and access. A preferred source of care may be distant, expensive, or unavailable after relocation. Find out what is realistically accessible and what advice is needed. Check current information through appropriate services rather than

assuming that a family member's experience establishes what is available today. Practical barriers deserve planning, but they should not be concealed beneath a promise that the couple will somehow manage.

Allow room for uncertainty about parenthood. A person may want children but not yet know the desired timing, or may wish to understand a health issue first. Identify what would support a decision and whether both can accept the current position. Do not demand an immediate answer merely because the wedding is approaching. If the uncertainty affects compatibility fundamentally, address it before commitment.

Prepare also for family boundaries. Relatives may ask intrusive questions, offer unwanted advice, or announce expectations publicly. The couple can agree on a brief response that protects privacy and on how support will be sought when wanted. Family affection can be welcomed without transferring reproductive decisions to an audience. The responsibility is to make informed choices together while respecting individual consent and appropriate professional guidance.

When pregnancy does not occur as hoped

Some couples will encounter difficulty conceiving even after careful preparation. WHO explains that infertility may involve male, female, or unexplained factors (World Health Organization, 2025). This corrects the damaging assumption

that a woman is automatically responsible when a pregnancy does not occur. A couple should seek appropriate clinical assessment and avoid using blame, public pressure, or unsupported explanations as substitutes for care.

The purpose of discussing this possibility before marriage is not to predict infertility. It is to consider how the couple would respond to uncertainty and disappointment. Would both be willing to seek advice? How would they manage costs, privacy, and family enquiries? Could each person remain valued if a hoped-for outcome did not occur? These questions concern commitment and care as well as a medical issue.

No premarital test can certify that the couple will conceive or have a particular number of children. A previous pregnancy also does not settle every future question. Avoid requiring a person to demonstrate fertility before marriage or treating reproductive capacity as the basis of their human worth. Such expectations can introduce coercion and obscure the wider relationship the couple is considering.

Treatment decisions should be made through appropriate professional information and voluntary consideration. Ask about the proposed intervention, realistic expectations, costs, risks, and alternatives through qualified services. The couple may also wish to reflect on religious convictions, but spiritual guidance should not replace clinical explanation. No leader should

promise that a prayer, product, or particular treatment guarantees a child.

Consider emotional and practical support. Repeated appointments, expenses, disappointment, and intrusive questions may require boundaries and help beyond the couple. A trusted counsellor or support service may assist with coping and communication within competence. Do not assume that every person wants their difficulty disclosed to relatives or included in public prayer. Consent matters even where the intention is supportive.

Other possibilities, including adoption or a life without children, should be considered only where the adults wish to explore them. Adoption has legal, ethical, and practical requirements that need current advice in the relevant jurisdiction. It should not be portrayed as an immediate replacement for a pregnancy that did not occur. Children are people with needs and histories, and any parenting decision requires more than resolving an adult's disappointment.

Parenthood requires time care and shared responsibility

Desiring a child and preparing to parent are related but distinct tasks. Parenting involves continuing care, supervision, emotional availability, resources, and decisions that change as the child develops. Before marriage, prospective parents should

consider what those responsibilities would mean in their circumstances. The question extends beyond whether they can pay school fees or whether grandparents are enthusiastic about the idea of a baby.

Discuss the everyday division of care. Who would respond at night, attend appointments, arrange childcare, and manage contact with a school? How would paid work and household tasks be adjusted? A promise that one partner will help can conceal the assumption that the other remains responsible for noticing and organising everything. Shared responsibility includes planning and follow-through, as well as completing a task when instructed.

Consider a fictional couple, Wanjiku and Ade. Both intend to remain employed after having a child. Ade assumes his mother will provide daily childcare, but she has not agreed and lives far away. Wanjiku assumes Ade will adjust his work hours, which he considers impossible. Their preparation needs confirmed arrangements and alternatives. Affection for a future child cannot supply care that nobody has agreed to provide.

Discuss discipline and the emotional climate of the home. How would the adults respond to mistakes, disagreement, distress, or a child's different interests? Avoid building an agreement around humiliation, threats, or violence. Seek suitable parenting education and safeguarding guidance where needed. A child

should not become a witness recruited to support one parent's account of a marital conflict or a messenger carrying hostile communication.

Existing children require their own consideration. A new marriage may alter routines, household membership, finances, and contact with other caregivers. The adults should plan with attention to the child's needs and relevant legal arrangements. A new spouse should not assume unrestricted parental authority immediately, and the child should not be required to perform affection to protect adult feelings. Transitions need patience and suitable support.

Preparation should allow for a child's individual needs, including disability, illness, or support requirements not anticipated by the adults. No couple can plan every possibility. They can nevertheless discuss how they would seek help, share care, and review responsibilities. Parenthood is a continuing relationship with a person whose development cannot be controlled through confidence or a rigid picture of the ideal family.

Paid work education and the organisation of time

Employment and education affect the household through income, hours, location, travel, identity, and opportunity. Discuss the actual demands rather than only the prestige of an occupation. A partner working shifts may be unavailable at

expected times. A business owner may have irregular income and extensive responsibility. A student may need protected study time. These realities should inform planning before either is interpreted as neglect.

Consider both people's opportunities. A decision that one career always takes priority can have substantial consequences for the other person's income, confidence, and future options. The couple should discuss how competing opportunities would be evaluated and which sacrifices each is willing to make. A higher current salary does not automatically settle every question about whose future deserves attention.

Where relocation is involved, investigate professional and educational implications. Qualifications may need recognition, training may be required, and employment may not be immediately available. Requirements vary and can change, so use current official information or qualified advice relevant to the destination. A partner's assurance that work will be easy to find should not substitute for a realistic understanding of the process.

Prepare for periods of unemployment or reduced income. How would the household review costs and responsibilities? What support would be available while someone looks for work? Avoid treating temporary dependence as permission to humiliate or remove their voice. Equally, both adults should be honest

about effort, circumstances, and what is feasible. The agreement needs accountability without assuming that employment outcomes are wholly within personal control.

Work boundaries also matter. Discuss travel, social contact, confidentiality, and digital availability without requiring control over every colleague or message. A partner should not be expected to breach workplace confidentiality to reassure a spouse. Where there is a conflict of interest or a relevant workplace rule, suitable professional guidance may be needed. Household expectations should respect the responsibilities attached to the job.

Education can remain a shared planning concern after marriage. Agree how study time, costs, and care responsibilities would be handled if either wishes to continue learning. Do not assume that a promise made during courtship will remain practicable without arrangements. The couple needs to consider the whole week, including the tasks that must still occur while one person is attending classes or preparing for examinations.

A couple running a business together needs additional clarity about roles. Discuss who owns the business, whether either person's work will be paid, which decisions require consultation, and what access each will have to relevant information. Household money and business cash should be understood distinctly so that apparent income is not confused with funds

required for operations. If an arrangement involves ownership, a guarantee, or another substantial obligation, obtain suitable professional advice and appropriate documentation. Avoid relying entirely on an informal promise that marriage will make every interest shared. The couple should understand the position each would occupy before committing labour, savings, or professional opportunities to the enterprise.

Household work and responsibilities that go unnoticed

Every household requires work that may receive little recognition because it does not produce a salary. Meals, cleaning, shopping, repairs, appointment planning, laundry, and care all consume time. So does remembering what needs to happen. Premarital preparation should make these responsibilities visible before they are assigned automatically according to gender, earning level, or a family's customary practice.

List tasks through an ordinary period and consider who would undertake them. Include arranging supplies, keeping track of bills, and noticing when a dependent needs assistance. The person who carries this planning work may appear to be doing little at a particular moment while still holding substantial responsibility. A fair arrangement recognises both the task and the coordination that makes it possible.

Skill can be developed. Someone who did not cook or clean in their family home should not assume permanent exemption. Learning may take time, and standards may differ. The couple can agree what is necessary and how responsibilities will be learned or shared. Avoid using criticism to make a partner abandon a task and then claiming that the task must always belong to the more capable person.

Consider how the arrangement changes during illness, pregnancy, demanding work, or caring emergencies. If the usual pattern depends on one adult being continually available, it needs an alternative. Shared responsibility can involve temporarily carrying more while the other is limited. It should also include review so that a temporary adjustment does not become an indefinite burden that neither has openly accepted.

Where paid domestic help is involved, plan costs and respectful working conditions. Do not treat a worker as a solution that removes every household responsibility from the adults. The couple remains responsible for planning, appropriate supervision, privacy, and conduct within the home. Applicable employment obligations require current local guidance. A worker's dignity should not depend on their social position or economic need.

A household plan should be understandable and flexible rather than punitive. The goal is to prevent assumptions from creating

an unfair workload. Some couples prefer fixed responsibilities; others alternate or review arrangements regularly. The useful test is whether essential work occurs, the burden is feasible, and both can raise a concern. An arrangement deserves revision when it leaves one person persistently exhausted or without meaningful choice.

Money plans that reflect actual circumstances

A household budget is a practical account of expected resources and responsibilities. Begin with reliable income and distinguish it from occasional earnings or hoped-for opportunities. Identify essential living costs, debt commitments, dependants, care needs, and other agreed expenditure. The plan should reflect the life the couple is proposing rather than the lifestyle they wish others to believe they can afford.

Wedding costs deserve particular attention because they can shape the beginning of married life. A celebration may create pressure to spend beyond available resources or incur obligations that affect housing, care, and daily expenses. Discuss priorities before accepting costly commitments. A modest ceremony does not establish a lesser marriage, and community expectations should not obscure the household consequences of expenditure.

Agree how financial information will be shared and decisions made. Both should understand significant household obligations

even if one keeps the records. Consider a practical level at which an expense needs discussion and how urgent needs will be handled. The arrangement should preserve suitable personal autonomy while supporting accountability. It should not require surrendering passwords or accepting unexplained control over every purchase.

Consider irregular income. A couple may need to separate essential commitments from spending that can wait, review the budget more frequently, or retain funds for a lower-income period where feasible. Not every household can save immediately. Acknowledge that limit without treating it as failure of discipline. Planning should help people use the resources available and identify realistic support, rather than shame them for conditions they cannot quickly change.

Major borrowing, property commitments, joint liabilities, or business arrangements may require independent professional advice. The legal and financial consequences depend on the transaction and jurisdiction. Neither affection nor a counselling agreement determines those consequences. Understand the terms before signing, and avoid taking obligations you cannot explain merely because a prospective spouse says trust requires it.

Review the plan together as circumstances change. Increased income does not automatically justify increased demands from

every direction, and reduced income requires more than blame. The couple should identify priorities and consider the effects on both people. This chapter offers household planning principles, not investment recommendations or a universal formula for dividing earnings. A workable plan fits their actual responsibilities and preserves informed participation.

Supporting relatives while protecting a workable home

Support for relatives may be a valued part of marriage and a practical necessity. Parents, siblings, and other dependants can rely on contributions for housing, education, or care. These responsibilities should be made visible before marriage. The couple needs to understand who currently depends on support, what is predictable, and what may arise unexpectedly. Family loyalty becomes easier to plan when its practical meaning is clear.

Distinguish regular obligations from requests that can be considered individually. A monthly contribution to a parent's care differs from financing a relative's optional purchase. A genuine emergency may require a different response from routine expenditure. The couple can agree how to discuss these distinctions without deciding that every refusal indicates selfishness or that every request creates an unavoidable duty.

In a fictional example, Chisom supports her younger brother's education, while Daniel contributes to his father's treatment costs. Their marriage plan initially assumes both commitments will continue unchanged. When they add housing and transport, the total exceeds their reliable income. They need to examine options and seek suitable help rather than hide the shortfall. The responsibilities are real, but the resources must still be accounted for.

Do not promise another person's participation without consent. A sibling may be unable to share a contribution, and a parent may not be willing to move. Family conversations can help where appropriate, but the couple should protect private information and avoid presenting a spouse as the obstacle responsible for every limit. An agreement communicated as a joint decision can reduce scapegoating while still allowing relatives to express concerns.

Consider support beyond money. Hosting, transport, administrative assistance, and emotional availability can all create demands. A relative staying during treatment may require care that falls primarily on one spouse. Include that work in the plan. A financial agreement can appear balanced while the practical labour remains unequal and unacknowledged.

Review limits when circumstances change. A new child, loss of income, or illness may affect what can be provided. The couple

should communicate responsibly rather than make commitments privately that the shared household cannot sustain. Supporting relatives and maintaining a workable marriage need not be opposing goals, but they require honest capacity, fair participation, and willingness to acknowledge when further assistance is necessary.

Preparing for disruption and access to help

No household plan removes the possibility of illness, job loss, bereavement, displacement, or an unexpected caring responsibility. Preparation can nevertheless identify how the couple would respond and where help might be found. The aim is to reduce confusion where possible, not create an illusion that every difficulty can be controlled through sufficient foresight.

Identify appropriate contacts and services relevant to the couple's circumstances. These might include a usual healthcare provider, a trusted person, suitable counselling resources, and relevant emergency services. Contact details should be current and accessible. A list copied from another country may be unusable. The couple should understand what support is actually available locally rather than assume that a name or telephone number establishes access.

Where affordable and appropriate, obtain reliable advice about available insurance or other protection. Consider the actual coverage, exclusions, access arrangements, and cost through

suitable providers or advisers. Do not assume that a product covers every event or that all households can purchase the same protection. This book does not recommend a particular policy. It encourages informed attention to practical vulnerability.

Keep access to essential personal documents and relevant information. Each adult should be able to obtain their own records and understand significant shared commitments. A practical plan should not depend entirely on one person remembering every account, appointment, or contact. At the same time, secure sensitive information and avoid sharing credentials unnecessarily. Preparedness and privacy can be considered together.

Discuss how you would ask for help if illness, job loss or a caregiving emergency disrupted the household. Agree whom you can contact privately and what practical support you could request.

Revisit the plan when a transition occurs. Marriage, relocation, a child's arrival, changed employment, and illness can alter what is feasible. An agreement that once worked may need adjustment. The couple's ability to review responsibilities fairly matters as much as the original arrangement. Preparing for disruption includes willingness to learn from circumstances rather than defending an outdated plan at another person's expense.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Describe an ordinary week under the couple's proposed arrangements. Include paid work, household tasks, care, travel, rest, and time together. Identify conflicting demands.

2. Prepare a private health planning note with the individual's agreement. Include practical support needs and appropriate professional follow-up without collecting unnecessary records.

3. Identify an inherited-health question that needs qualified explanation. Distinguish a relevant result from assumptions based on appearance, family reputation, or informal advice.

4. Review reproductive expectations, including uncertainty and family pressure. Which matters require discussion, medical advice, or a compatibility decision before marriage?

5. Prepare a basic household budget using reliable resources. Include existing dependants, care needs, debts, and the effects of wedding expenditure.

6. Examine the division of household work. Who notices, plans, performs, and reviews each responsibility? What happens if that person becomes unavailable?

7. For guides, identify two matters you can address educationally and two requiring appropriate healthcare, legal, financial, or safeguarding assistance.

All cases are fictional illustrations. Activities support education and planning; they are not clinical assessments, personalised

medical instructions, or a guarantee against illness or marital difficulty.

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Chapter 9

Equipping Pastors Counsellors and Parents to Guide Responsibly

Guiding the decision without taking ownership of it

The previous chapters have asked prospective spouses to understand themselves, learn about one another, examine family influences, recognise significant differences, practise communication, and consider the ordinary demands of married life. These tasks require time and honest participation. They also require an environment in which questions are welcomed and difficult information can be considered. This chapter turns to the people who help create that environment: pastors, counsellors, parents, and other trusted guides.

A guide's responsibility is to help adults make an informed decision about the life they are proposing. The guide cannot live that life for them. Approval from a respected leader cannot replace knowledge of a partner, and family enthusiasm cannot settle an unresolved disagreement. The quality of guidance depends partly on whether both individuals leave with greater understanding and freedom to decide. A successful process may lead to marriage, a purposeful pause, or a respectful decision to part.

Consider a fictional couple, Amaka and David. Their families have announced the wedding, and their pastor introduced them. During preparation, Amaka explains that David expects her to leave paid employment immediately after marriage. She has never agreed to this. The pastor feels uncomfortable because postponement might suggest that his introduction was unwise. If he urges her to accept the arrangement simply to protect the ceremony, his interest has displaced her need for informed choice.

The responsible response begins with the actual difference. What does each person expect? What consequences would the arrangement have? Is either willing to reconsider? Can they discuss the matter freely? The introduction may have been offered sincerely, yet further information can still change the decision. Neither a pastor's reputation nor money already spent creates an obligation to marry. Guides need enough humility to allow their earlier confidence to be revised.

Adetunji (2026c, Chapter 2) discusses the pastor’s role and its limits in Shepherding Marriages. Tell the couple what guidance you can provide and leave them free to consider it and make their own decision.

Parents and counsellors face similar temptations. A parent may want a socially admired match; a counsellor may become invested in the apparent success of a programme. These interests

deserve reflection because they can affect what is heard and what is dismissed. The couple's decision should be assessed through the information and commitments involved, rather than through the guide's need to produce a wedding.

Naming the service and the limits of competence

Before sensitive conversations begin, explain what kind of help is being offered. Premarital education may involve structured learning, guided discussion, reflection on expectations, and practical planning. Pastoral care may include spiritual support and theological reflection. Mediation concerns a defined disagreement and requires suitable conditions. Clinical assessment or treatment requires relevant competence and lawful authority. These activities can overlap in conversation, but they should not be presented as interchangeable services.

Experience of a long marriage can provide useful examples, yet it does not establish competence in every difficulty another couple faces. Ordination, academic qualifications, age, or community respect likewise do not authorise every form of practice. A guide should describe their actual training and role accurately. Someone qualified in one area may still need referral or consultation in another. Competence includes knowing when further help is necessary.

Explain the service in ordinary language. A pastor might say, “We will discuss your expectations, values, family relationships,

and practical plans. I can offer pastoral guidance and help you identify questions. Where a concern needs medical, legal, or specialist assistance, I will help you find appropriate support." This statement gives the couple a clearer basis for participation than a promise that every problem will be solved before the wedding.

The distinction matters when health questions arise from Chapter 8. A guide may help partners prepare questions for a clinician, discuss the practical implications of care, or consider how to protect privacy. They should not interpret unfamiliar laboratory results, prescribe treatment, or promise that a screening programme certifies marital suitability. Similarly, a discussion about distress should not become an improvised diagnosis based on a questionnaire or a person's manner of speaking.

Stay equally clear about legal and financial questions. A couple may need reliable advice about a previous marriage, existing children, property, immigration, or a substantial financial obligation. The guide can identify why the question matters and encourage current qualified advice in the relevant jurisdiction. They should avoid giving a confident universal answer where requirements depend on the location and facts. Educational guidance remains useful without claiming expertise it does not possess.

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (2026) addresses informed consent, professional competence and the limits of practice in its code of ethics. Use it as a professional reference and identify the rules that apply where you practise, including when you work across borders.

Agreeing on participation before collecting personal information

Participation should begin with a clear explanation of the process. Describe its purpose, likely topics, format, expected time, fees where applicable, and possible referrals. Explain who will attend, whether individual conversations are included, and how information will be handled. Invite questions before asking for family histories, health concerns, or relationship difficulties. A signed form can record an agreement, but the explanation and the person's understanding matter as well.

In a church setting, distinguish attendance requirements from consent to particular disclosures. A church may have an established preparation programme for weddings it conducts. Couples should know that policy early, including the options available if they seek another provider or need more time. Attendance should not be used to justify demands for unrestricted access to private information. The consequences of declining a question or requesting different support should be explained honestly.

Consent is an ongoing conversation. A couple may initially agree to joint meetings and later discover that a particular concern is difficult to discuss safely in that format. They may request a break, a different guide, or specialist support. A change of circumstances may require the process to be reviewed. Do not interpret every request for adjustment as resistance to learning. Sometimes it reveals a practical barrier or an important concern about the service itself.

For example, a fictional church programme asks participants to bring medical documents to a group session. One woman objects because she does not want other participants to hear her health history. Her objection should lead the team to reconsider the design. The educational topic may be appropriate while the method of collecting information is intrusive. The programme can teach informed healthcare planning without making private records a public entry requirement.

Check that agreement is meaningful for each adult. One partner may answer on behalf of both; a parent may pay the fee and assume the right to choose the topics. Ask each participant directly what they understand and what help they seek. Payment does not transfer ownership of the person's disclosures. Where someone appears unable to refuse because of threats or dependence, consider safer individual support and appropriate

specialist advice rather than treating apparent agreement as sufficient.

Explain recording and observation separately. A training student, an interpreter, a camera, or an automated transcription service changes who may access information. Seek specific informed agreement, consider applicable requirements, and offer alternatives where possible. A person should not discover afterwards that a private conversation became teaching material. Learning about marriage should not require surrendering reasonable control over one's own story.

Protecting confidentiality within families and congregations

Confidentiality requires planning because premarital education often sits within an active network of relatives, elders, and church workers. A leader may be approached after worship by a mother who asks what her daughter said. A wedding committee may request an explanation for a delay. A prayer group may expect names and details. These requests can sound caring while still exposing information that was entrusted for another purpose.

Explain confidentiality and its limits at the outset. Identify who can access records, what information is ordinarily shared, and what circumstances may require disclosure under applicable law or safeguarding duties. Avoid promises that nothing could ever

be disclosed. Also avoid vague statements that everything may be shared whenever the guide considers it useful. Participants need a practical understanding of the arrangement and an opportunity to ask questions about it.

Couple work introduces another question: how will information disclosed individually be handled? A private meeting is not automatically a promise to conceal every significant matter indefinitely, nor is it permission to repeat everything to the partner. Establish the policy before individual disclosures occur. If significant concealed information emerges, seek suitable ethical consultation and discuss safe options, which may include pausing joint work. Do not improvise an unexpected disclosure rule under pressure.

The AAMFT Code of Ethics recognises the special confidentiality concerns of work involving more than one client and requires explanation of confidentiality limits (AAMFT, 2026). The underlying lesson for premarital guides is to anticipate the difficulty rather than wait until a secret has already created it. Local law, the service's nature, and the agreed policy must guide action. Confidentiality questions should receive competent advice when obligations are unclear.

In a fictional example, David privately reveals an unresolved financial commitment that would substantially affect the proposed household. The guide should not promise to hide it

permanently while continuing to certify that the couple has discussed their finances fully. Nor should the guide announce it to Amaka during a family gathering. They need to consider the existing confidentiality agreement, encourage responsible clarification, assess safety, and obtain consultation where necessary.

Protect information in ordinary administration as well. Appointment lists should not identify sensitive concerns to every volunteer. Messages should reveal only what is needed for their purpose. A delay can often be communicated without supplying private reasons. Avoid using identifiable stories in sermons or workshops, even when names are omitted but the circumstances remain recognisable. A community's closeness makes discretion more necessary, especially where a distinctive event could identify the couple immediately.

Welcoming family wisdom without allowing pressure to decide

Family involvement can provide valuable knowledge and practical support. Parents may help clarify existing responsibilities, explain a custom, or identify an assumption that the couple has overlooked. They may offer housing, transport, childcare, or advice learned through experience. Chapter 3 invited partners to understand this wider system. Responsible guidance should make room for useful contributions while

preserving the adults' participation in decisions that will shape their lives.

Ask what purpose a family meeting would serve before inviting relatives. Is the couple seeking clarification about a customary ceremony, discussing an existing dependant, or requesting practical assistance? Agree on the topics and who will attend. A focused conversation is easier to manage than an open gathering in which every elder assumes authority over every issue. The couple should know what information will be shared and what remains private.

Parents can speak about concerns through specific observations. “You have not yet discussed where you will live” offers a question that can be examined. “People from that family cannot be trusted” makes a sweeping judgement and may conceal prejudice. A history of harmful conduct should be taken seriously, but ethnicity, disability, income, nationality, or a relative's reputation should not become automatic verdicts on an individual's character. Ask what is actually known and what requires clarification.

Distinguish protective concern from a demand for obedience. A parent may reasonably be worried about intimidation, deception, or a plan that leaves their child without support. They can name the concern, offer help, and encourage appropriate advice. Threatening abandonment unless the child chooses the parent's

preferred partner changes the conditions of choice. Guides should recognise this difference even where the threat is described as loving discipline.

Consider a fictional father who financed his daughter's education and now expects her marriage to provide support for several relatives. His contribution can be acknowledged without assuming that it gives him unrestricted authority over her future household. Discuss actual needs, proposed contributions, and feasible limits. Chapter 8's planning questions help translate family loyalty into responsibilities that can be considered realistically. Gratitude should not require an adult to conceal a commitment from a prospective spouse.

Where families disagree, the guide can help clarify the disagreement without creating competing camps. The couple may need time to understand a concern, obtain accurate information, or decide what boundaries they can sustain. A meeting should not end with a forced public agreement merely because elders expect closure. Some matters require further reflection. A respectful process allows an answer to remain pending while identifying what should happen next.

Using spiritual authority with care and accountability

Christian premarital education can help people consider the meaning of covenant, faithfulness, responsibility, and care.

Scripture and prayer may provide language for reflection and hope. The question is how these resources are used when a couple encounters difficult information. Spiritual guidance should support truthful discernment and responsible action. It should not make the guide's personal preference impossible to question by presenting that preference as God's unquestionable instruction.

A couple may report a dream, prophecy, or strong conviction that they should marry. Listen respectfully and ask how they are also learning about the proposed relationship. What do they know about each other's commitments and conduct? Can they disagree freely? Have practical questions been considered? A spiritual experience should not be treated as evidence that ordinary enquiry is unnecessary or that subsequent warning signs must be ignored.

Distinguish shared religious affiliation from shared understanding. Two active church members may differ about money, gender roles, church attendance, ministry travel, parenting, or decision-making. The guide can ask what those beliefs mean in daily practice. Agreement on religious language may hide incompatible expectations. For example, both partners may value service while one assumes that the other will provide unpaid household labour whenever ministry demands arise. The practical arrangement still needs discussion.

Biblical teaching should be handled with attention to dignity and accountability. James 1:19 encourages readiness to listen and restraint in speaking and anger; this can support the conversational practices explored in Chapter 7. Proverbs 15:22 recognises the value of counsel; it does not transfer a person's entire decision to an adviser. Christian care also needs to consider how interpretation affects a person who is frightened, dependent, or unable to speak freely.

Do not use submission, forgiveness, or patience to excuse threats or rush commitment. Someone's willingness to forgive does not establish that a relationship is safe or that marriage should proceed. A person may retain faith while deciding that the proposed partnership is incompatible. Equally, professional treatment or specialist advice should not be portrayed as evidence of deficient prayer. Pastoral support can continue alongside other appropriate services when the person welcomes it.

A fictional pastor tells Amaka that postponement would disappoint God because the wedding has already been blessed publicly. This statement adds spiritual fear to an unresolved practical disagreement. A more responsible response would acknowledge what remains uncertain and help the couple consider it honestly. A blessing should express care, not become a mechanism for preventing reconsideration. Leaders should be

accountable for the effects of their words as well as their intentions.

Listening carefully and asking questions that help

The skills described in Chapter 7 apply to guides themselves. Listen before deciding what the issue means. Invite each person to explain their concern, clarify important words, and summarise what you have understood. Avoid rewarding the more confident speaker simply because their account sounds organised. Hesitation, silence, or limited fluency may reflect many circumstances. They should prompt respectful enquiry rather than an automatic judgement about honesty or maturity.

Questions should serve an identifiable purpose. “What led you to seek a relationship at this point?” explores motivation. “What does support mean to you when you are under pressure?” clarifies a need. “What did you understand your partner to have agreed to?” can reveal an assumption. A question is less useful when it merely pressures the person to endorse an answer that the guide has already selected.

Offer room for differing accounts. Ask about an event without assuming that one description contains every relevant fact. Distinguish observations from interpretations: a partner missed an appointment; the other understood this as disregard; the explanation offered was a work emergency. These are related but separate pieces of information. The guide can help determine

what needs clarification and what action would follow, without claiming perfect knowledge of hidden motives.

Use questionnaires, genograms, or written exercises carefully. They can organise reflection, reveal topics for discussion, and reduce the chance that an important subject is overlooked. They should not become automatic measures of character or predictions of marital success. Explain the tool's purpose and limits. Where an instrument is designed for professional assessment, use requires relevant training, permission, and adherence to its instructions. A homemade score should not be presented as validated.

Interpret family history without fatalism. A genogram may show repeated separation, caregiving burdens, bereavement, or strained relationships. These patterns invite questions about experience and current expectations. They do not prove that the individual will repeat a relative's behaviour. Conversely, belonging to a respected family does not remove the need to consider present conduct. The useful focus is what the person has learned, how they now act, and what support they may need.

Avoid collecting intimate detail merely because it is available. A person may explain that a past event affects trust without needing to recount every aspect during premarital education. Ask what information is necessary for the current purpose and whether another setting would be more appropriate. Sensitive

enquiry should increase understanding without turning preparation into an interrogation. The guide's curiosity is not, by itself, a sufficient reason to ask a question.

Responding to fear coercion and threats

If a person appears afraid to speak in front of a partner, find a safe way to offer private support. Consider what could happen if the partner learns about the disclosure.

Where possible and safe, provide an opportunity to speak privately without the partner or relatives controlling the conversation. Explain confidentiality limits and avoid promising an outcome you cannot guarantee. Ask what immediate help is needed and how contact can occur safely. Messages, appointment reminders, or referral details may be visible to another person. A useful service can still create risk if communication arrangements are careless.

The World Health Organization (2021) calls its approach LIVES. It involves listening, asking about needs, validating the person’s experience, enhancing safety and offering support. See Chapter 7 for how to respond to a disclosure and arrange appropriate help.

If danger is immediate, prioritise appropriate emergency assistance and urgent safety support in the person's location. Where a child or another vulnerable person may be at risk, follow applicable safeguarding and reporting duties.

Requirements differ, so programmes need current advice and an established procedure before a crisis occurs. Do not delay urgent help while trying to complete an educational activity, secure family agreement, or protect the congregation's reputation.

Threats of suicide, self-harm, or harm to someone else require serious attention and appropriate professional or emergency support. A guide should not dismiss them as manipulation or assume that prayer alone resolves the risk. Nor should a prospective spouse be told that marrying is the necessary way to keep the threatening person alive. Support for the person at risk and freedom of marital choice must both be preserved through appropriate assistance.

Returning to the fictional couple, suppose Amaka says that David has threatened her if she postpones. The task has changed. It is no longer simply a disagreement about employment. A joint meeting intended to secure compromise may increase danger or pressure. The guide should arrange suitable individual support, seek specialist consultation, and avoid contacting David about her disclosure without considering obligations and safety. Responsibility for the threat remains with the person making it.

Managing overlapping roles, gifts and personal interests

In a congregation or close community, a guide may know both families socially, employ one partner, receive donations from a

relative, or have introduced the couple. These overlapping relationships can affect judgement and make confidentiality harder to protect. The answer requires deliberate attention to the actual roles and risks. A guide should ask whether each person can raise a concern without fearing consequences in another part of life.

For example, a pastor who supervises David's paid work may struggle to separate premarital guidance from employment decisions. David may fear that admitting a difficulty will affect his livelihood. Amaka may believe that the pastor will favour an employee. Another suitable provider may offer a better setting. Where an overlap cannot readily be avoided, explain it, obtain appropriate consultation, and establish safeguards. Some conflicts are substantial enough to require transfer of the work.

Adetunji (2026a, Chapter 2) assesses boundary decisions in terms of power, dependence and the person’s ability to choose freely. Consider whether an apparently generous gesture creates an obligation that makes refusal harder.

Gifts and hospitality need an agreed approach. A modest customary gesture differs in context from a costly gift offered while a guide is deciding whether to endorse a wedding. Consider whether acceptance might imply preference, create obligation, or influence the service. Explain the programme's policy respectfully and apply it consistently. A refusal can

acknowledge generosity without humiliating the giver. Consultation can help where the appropriate response is uncertain.

Financial arrangements should be transparent. State fees and payment conditions before the service begins. Avoid making supportive attention depend on unannounced gifts or donations. Do not turn access to a guide into an opportunity to recruit the couple into a personal business. A parent paying the fee should know that payment does not provide unrestricted access to confidential records or purchase a favourable judgement about the relationship.

Maintain personal boundaries in communication and contact. Emotional dependence, flirtation, secret messages, and invitations that serve the guide's own needs undermine the helping role. A person seeking support should not be made responsible for the guide's loneliness or admiration. Programmes need a safe route for raising concerns about a guide, including someone outside that person's immediate control. Authority without accessible accountability leaves participants with too few options when conduct becomes troubling.

Organising a programme that follows the couple's actual needs

A coherent premarital programme should build on learning rather than repeat disconnected lectures. The sequence of this

book offers a useful educational structure: personal reflection, family understanding, learning about the partner, honest questions, compatibility, communication, and practical planning. A guide can adapt the pace and examples while retaining these purposes. Completing a timetable is not enough if the couple has not understood the issues relevant to their proposed marriage.

At first contact, ask what the couple seeks and what they have already discussed. Identify the intended wedding date, major practical constraints, and any concerns requiring attention before joint work. Explain the process and agree on manageable next steps. Avoid beginning with a demand for extensive disclosure before trust and confidentiality have been addressed. An early conversation can reveal that a specialist referral or additional time is needed.

Group teaching can introduce common topics efficiently. Private work can help individuals apply those topics to their own circumstances. Keep the functions distinct: a group should not become the place where someone must disclose a diagnosis, debt, past harm, or disagreement. Participants can use fictional examples publicly and reflect privately on personal matters. They should know how to request individual help without having to announce the reason to everyone.

Allow enough time between meetings for learning and clarification. Partners may need to check an assumption, obtain qualified advice, or observe whether an agreed change occurs. A programme delivered immediately before the ceremony may leave little freedom to respond to significant information. Encourage preparation early where possible. If couples arrive late, explain the limits honestly and address important concerns rather than promise that a compressed schedule has removed them.

Make learning accessible. Consider language, literacy, disability, work schedules, transport, and costs. An oral reflection can sometimes serve the purpose of a written exercise. An independent interpreter may be needed, with confidentiality explained. Large print, suitable meeting access, or a quieter environment may support participation. Adapt the method without assuming that difficulty with a worksheet means poor commitment or inability to understand married life.

Assess understanding through application. Ask each person to describe an unresolved expectation, explain an agreed practical arrangement, or identify where further help is needed. These responses reveal more than a certificate of attendance. A completion statement should accurately describe the education provided and any limits on what it establishes. It should not

certify that the guide has investigated every claim, predicted future conduct, or guaranteed that the marriage will succeed.

Adapting guidance for online distance and absentia arrangements

Chapter 4 considered the many ways people meet, including introductions, work, school, social gatherings, and digital platforms. Distance may shape what partners can learn before commitment. Some couples prepare online, meet physically only near the ceremony, or enter an absentia arrangement before relocating. Guides should examine what is known and what remains uncertain without treating a particular route of meeting as proof of either safety or failure.

Separate the convenience of communication from the depth of knowledge it provides. Regular video calls may show how a person speaks and responds within that setting. They do not necessarily reveal everyday responsibilities, relationships, living arrangements, or conduct under ordinary pressure. Ask how the couple has learned about these areas and what information has been checked appropriately. Do not confuse frequent contact with comprehensive understanding.

Consider a fictional pair, Ruth in Kigali and Samuel in another country. Their relatives have arranged an introduction, and most wedding plans are being made through messages. Ruth expects to continue studying after relocation; Samuel assumes she will

care for a relative full time. Online preparation should bring these assumptions into discussion before travel and marriage commitments deepen. The guide can help identify specific unanswered questions and realistic ways to clarify them.

Identity and background questions require responsible methods. Encourage transparent conversation and lawful verification through appropriate channels when relevant. Do not recommend hacking accounts, secretly tracking a person, impersonating someone, or gathering information through coercion. A guide should not claim that a social media profile or an introduction from a respected relative establishes every important fact. Conversely, uncertainty should be described accurately rather than converted into an unsupported accusation of fraud.

For online sessions, ask where each participant is located and whether they can speak privately. Establish what to do if the connection fails, how urgent help would be accessed, and which communication channels are suitable. Where professional services cross borders, check relevant practice requirements and limits. A familiar platform does not remove privacy risks or jurisdictional questions. Use the technology in a way that supports the agreed purpose and confidentiality arrangements.

Absentia marriages and relocation may raise legal, immigration, and family questions that need current qualified advice. Do not give universal assurances about recognition or entry rights.

Educationally, ask whether both understand the proposed household, dependants, work prospects, support, and ability to obtain their own documents. If essential information remains missing, name that gap. Travel costs and public plans should not make further enquiry appear disloyal or unnecessary.

Making referrals and maintaining accountable records

A referral should connect the person with suitable help rather than simply end an uncomfortable conversation. Explain what concern requires another service, why that service may help, and what choices are available. Avoid presenting referral as punishment or evidence that the couple has failed. A guide can remain supportive within their role while a clinician, legal adviser, safeguarding service, or other competent professional addresses the relevant matter.

Keep a current referral list suited to the setting. Verify the provider's role, credentials where applicable, contact details, eligibility requirements, fees, languages, and practical access. A name on an old leaflet may no longer identify an available service. Include options for urgent assistance and for people with limited resources where these exist. Review the list periodically and seek feedback about access without requesting unnecessary details of the person's subsequent care.

Ask permission before sharing information unless a lawful obligation or urgent safety circumstance requires action. Explain what will be sent and why. A brief description of the relevant question may be sufficient; an entire family history may not be needed. Do not assume that agreeing to a referral authorises every future exchange of information. The receiving professional may have their own consent process and confidentiality requirements.

In a fictional example, a counsellor refers Samuel for qualified advice about an inherited-health question. The referral should identify the question and any information appropriately authorised for sharing. It should not label him unsuitable for marriage or demand that the clinician approve the wedding. The clinical task concerns accurate explanation and care. The couple then considers relevant implications through informed conversation, preserving individual dignity and choice.

Records should be accurate, proportionate, and securely maintained. Distinguish what someone reported from what the guide observed or concluded. Record significant agreements, referrals, consent arrangements, and actions where appropriate. Avoid speculative labels and unnecessary intimate detail. Access, retention, and disclosure need to follow applicable requirements and the stated service policy. A personal notebook

left where volunteers or relatives can read it is not a reliable confidentiality arrangement.

Consultation and supervision support accountable judgement. Discuss difficult questions with a suitably qualified person while protecting identifying information as appropriate. A guide should be able to explain the reason for an action and reconsider it when new information emerges. Consultation does not transfer all responsibility to the adviser. It helps the guide identify limits, consider options, and act more carefully within their actual role and obligations.

Reviewing readiness without promising certainty

As preparation progresses, bring the couple's learning together. What has become clearer about personal needs, family responsibilities, values, daily arrangements, and the handling of disagreement? Which questions remain unresolved? What information needs verification? What work has been undertaken, and what has merely been promised? A review should draw on the actual process rather than introduce a final score that appears to decide the relationship automatically.

Readiness includes the conditions under which agreement occurs. Can each person express a concern, request time, or decline a proposed arrangement without intimidation? Do they understand significant commitments, including those involving existing children and relatives? Are both participating in plans

whose consequences they can describe? These questions do not predict every future event. They help identify whether the present decision is sufficiently informed and freely considered.

When a pause is recommended, describe its purpose concretely. The couple may need to clarify employment expectations, obtain professional advice, discuss an existing obligation, or assess whether promised changes occur. Agree on how the issue will be reviewed where appropriate. Do not prescribe indefinite waiting for a person who does not wish to continue. Time is useful when it serves learning or action, not when it simply postpones an unwelcome conclusion.

When incompatibility remains, guides should permit an honest ending. Two people can have dignity and still propose lives that cannot be combined willingly. Avoid assigning moral failure merely because a wedding will not occur. Help the individuals think about safe communication, practical arrangements, and support, with qualified advice where necessary. A public explanation need not expose private histories or distribute blame to satisfy community curiosity.

If the couple chooses to proceed, encourage a plan for continuing conversation and access to help after marriage. Preparation cannot remove future illness, changes in work, bereavement, or unexpected family demands. A couple can nevertheless know where to seek support and how to revisit an arrangement. A

guide's continuing availability should have clear limits; support should not become permanent authority over every household decision.

Chapter 10 brings the information gathered during preparation into a decision and a plan for the first months of married life.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Describe your role in premarital preparation and identify three matters requiring assistance beyond that role.
2. Draft a plain language explanation of the programme, participation, confidentiality, fees, and referral arrangements.
3. Review the fictional Amaka and David case. Identify how the appropriate response changes when a disagreement becomes a reported threat.
4. Plan a focused family meeting. State its purpose, participants, information boundaries, and how the couple can request further time.
5. Identify an overlapping relationship in your setting. Explain its risks and whether safeguards or another guide would be more appropriate.
6. Review a referral list for current access and suitable services. Prepare an explanation that makes referral understandable and respectful.
7. Practise responding to a request from a relative for confidential information about a wedding delay.

8. Review a programme completion statement. Remove any claim that attendance guarantees marital success or verifies every important fact.

All cases are fictional illustrations. Activities support education and reflective practice. They are not clinical assessment tools or a substitute for applicable professional, legal, and safeguarding requirements.

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Chapter 10

Making an Informed Decision and Preparing for Married Life

Bringing the learning together

Premarital education reaches its purpose when what has been learned influences the decision. A couple may have attended meetings, answered questions, discussed family histories, and prepared a budget. Those activities matter when they help both individuals understand the partnership being proposed and decide whether they can enter it willingly. The final task is to bring the information together, address what remains uncertain, and prepare for the consequences of the choice.

This book has moved from the importance of preparation to personal awareness, family understanding, learning about a partner, honest enquiry, compatibility, communication, and practical planning. Chapter 9 considered how guides can support those tasks responsibly. The present chapter returns the decision to the prospective spouses. Parents, pastors, and counsellors can offer insight and appropriate support, but the adults need to understand the life they are choosing and retain meaningful freedom to choose it.

A final review should consider the actual proposed marriage. Where would the couple live? What responsibilities would each

undertake? How would existing children and dependants be cared for? What happens when they disagree? What important information remains unclear? Attraction and shared faith may be significant parts of the relationship, yet they do not answer every practical question. Readiness involves examining how the desired life could operate under the circumstances both people presently face.

Consider a fictional couple, Efe and Daniel. They have completed a church programme and agree that they love each other. Efe nevertheless expects to continue postgraduate study in another city, while Daniel assumes they will live near his parents and that she will provide daily assistance to them. They have discussed education and family loyalty separately but have never combined the plans. Their final review needs to identify this conflict before a ceremony turns assumptions into immediate household demands.

The review does not require perfect knowledge or a promise that neither person will change. It requires enough relevant understanding to make a responsible present decision, together with a workable approach to continuing uncertainty. Some unanswered questions can be addressed through ordinary planning. Others concern commitments that must be clarified before marriage. Where fear or coercion limits participation,

support and safety take priority over completing the review together.

Three broad outcomes remain available: proceed with an informed commitment, pause for defined clarification or work, or end the proposed partnership. These are ways of describing choices, not stages every couple must pass through. No worksheet should produce the answer automatically. The process should help each person explain their decision in terms of the relationship and proposed life, rather than in terms of what will satisfy an audience.

Hearing each person's own decision

Begin with individual reflection before seeking a shared answer. Each person can consider what attracts them to the relationship, what they have learned, what gives them confidence, and what continues to concern them. Ask what they would decide if no ceremony had been announced and no one were waiting for an answer. This question can help distinguish a wish to build a life with the partner from a wish to escape embarrassment or end an exhausting planning process.

A person should be able to describe why they want this partnership rather than only why they want marriage in general. Companionship, parenthood, belonging, spiritual commitment, and practical cooperation may all be meaningful hopes. The question is whether this particular relationship can reasonably

support those hopes in ways both people accept. A desired social status cannot substitute for understanding the prospective spouse's intentions and conduct.

Listen to differences in the strength or timing of commitment. One partner may be ready to marry while the other needs further clarification. The second person's uncertainty should not be translated immediately into lack of love. Ask what is uncertain and what would help them decide. Equally, the person seeking more time should not be pressured to offer a reassuring promise they cannot honestly make. An accurate answer may be difficult, but it provides a better basis for action.

Pastors and counsellors can offer individual space under the confidentiality arrangements established in Chapter 9. The purpose is to hear each adult's position, including whether they feel free to express it. Private reflection should not become a secret campaign to direct the outcome. Guides need to consider significant information through their agreed policy and applicable obligations, seeking consultation when required. Individual participation and responsible handling of information belong together.

In a fictional example, Daniel says that he is ready because his family approves and preparations are almost complete. When asked what Efe has agreed to, he cannot describe her expectations about study, work, or caregiving. His answer

reveals that public readiness and relational understanding have become confused. Efe, meanwhile, needs to explain her own preferred arrangements clearly rather than hope that the ceremony will somehow settle the difference.

The final decision should remain voluntary even when either person feels disappointed. Someone may be sad about a postponement or an ending without threatening the other's safety, livelihood, reputation, or faith. Where refusal brings intimidation, the freedom necessary for a shared decision is compromised. Appropriate individual support may be needed. No person should have to demonstrate sufficient courage under pressure before their concern is taken seriously.

Distinguishing knowledge, assumptions and unanswered questions

Organise the information already gathered into what is reasonably known, what is assumed, and what still needs clarification. A statement that a partner intends to relocate is different from an agreed plan showing where they would live and what each would do. A relative's description of someone as responsible is different from an explanation of their present commitments. This distinction can prevent confidence from growing faster than actual understanding.

Ask how a significant belief was formed. Was it discussed directly? Was it inferred from a photograph, a profession, church

membership, or family reputation? Did both people use an important word in the same way? Chapters 4 and 5 encouraged respectful learning about a partner. The final review can revisit a few central assumptions without turning the process into a general investigation of every private detail.

Clarify matters with consequences for informed choice. These may include intentions about marriage, existing marital or parental responsibilities, substantial obligations, living arrangements, health-related practical needs, and expectations about work or reproduction. The information sought should be relevant and obtained through appropriate means. Truthful preparation does not require unrestricted access to another person's devices, passwords, correspondence, or complete medical history. Privacy and responsibility can be considered together.

Where a question requires expertise, identify the question and obtain suitable advice. A health result needs qualified explanation; a legal status or cross-border arrangement may need current advice in the relevant jurisdiction. Do not rely on the guide's confidence when the underlying facts are uncertain. Record what remains to be established and how clarification will be sought. Avoid making irreversible commitments on the basis of an assurance that no one has checked.

A fictional couple, Lillian and Musa, believes that Musa's employer will provide housing after their wedding. The assumption came from a conversation about possible benefits, not a confirmed arrangement. They do not need to accuse the employer or abandon the relationship automatically. They need reliable information and an alternative if the housing is unavailable. Their plan becomes more responsible when it can survive the correction of an optimistic assumption.

Some information will remain unknowable. No person can verify every future response to illness, employment change, or bereavement. Recognise the difference between uncertainty about future events and a refusal to clarify a current significant commitment. The first requires flexibility and realistic hope. The second may limit informed consent to the proposed life. A promise that everything will be understood after marriage should not settle a question that materially affects the decision now.

Reviewing significant differences and actual responses

Return to the relational gaps identified in Chapter 6. Describe each significant difference through the positions involved and the consequences of each arrangement. “We disagree about independence” is too broad to guide action. “One of us expects consultation about relocation, while the other expects to decide alone” gives the couple a matter to examine. Accurate

description makes it easier to distinguish confusion about meaning from a genuine conflict between commitments.

Use the GAP framework from Chapter 6 to identify the difference and decide what kind of response it requires (Adetunji, 2025a, Chapter 3).

Review what happened when a difference was raised. Did each person listen and offer relevant information? Was a workable adjustment considered? Was a reasonable question met with threats, ridicule, or punishment? The response is part of the information about the relationship. A concern about money may reveal not only an expense but also whether both adults are permitted to participate in financial decisions. Do not assess the topic while overlooking the conditions of discussion.

Distinguish an expressed intention from action. Someone may promise to consult before confirming family visits; the couple can consider whether subsequent arrangements reflect that agreement. They do not need to manufacture tests or create secret traps. Ordinary opportunities provide information. A single successful conversation should not erase a persistent harmful pattern, and an imperfect attempt at a new skill should not automatically invalidate all progress. Examine the specific conduct and its significance.

Efe and Daniel might discover that both value her study and support for his parents, but their first plan places all

responsibilities on the same person at the same time. They could explore another location, delayed study, shared caregiving, or help from relatives, provided those options are freely considered and actually feasible. If Daniel insists that Efe's plans must disappear simply because they are marrying, the difference concerns participation as well as scheduling.

Do not require a prospective spouse to repair another adult before being allowed to decide. Supportive relationships can encourage learning, but each person remains responsible for their own conduct and commitments. A promise of eventual change cannot be demanded as an act of faith from someone who does not wish to accept the current conditions. A responsible decision considers what exists now, what has changed, and what remains only a hope.

Recognising momentum and pressure

Wedding preparations create a visible direction of travel. Invitations are issued, venues are booked, clothes are purchased, and relatives begin to organise their journeys. These actions may make reconsideration feel increasingly difficult. A couple can then proceed because stopping appears costly, even though important questions remain unanswered. The final review should identify how much of the decision rests on a wish to marry and how much rests on pressure to continue.

Stanley et al. (2006) argued that the practical ties created by premarital cohabitation in the United States can lead some couples towards marriage without a deliberate decision. Apply their question here to wedding and family pressure. Which preparations have made it harder to stop and consider what each of you freely wants?

Past investment deserves acknowledgement without becoming a command about the future. Time, affection, travel, money, and family effort may have been substantial. An ending can involve real loss. Yet the decision still concerns the life ahead under the conditions now understood. Having already spent a great deal does not establish that marriage is workable. Guides can help people address the losses practically without implying that proceeding is the only way to give the past meaning.

Pressure may also come through age, fertility expectations, a desired migration route, pregnancy, or comparison with married friends. These circumstances may affect a person's options and responsibilities, but they do not answer whether this partnership is compatible or freely chosen. Where pregnancy or existing children are involved, care and legal responsibilities need appropriate attention regardless of the marital decision. A wedding should not be presented as a universal solution to those distinct questions.

In a fictional family meeting, an aunt tells Efe that postponement would disgrace everyone who has bought a ticket. A guide can acknowledge the inconvenience and help discuss arrangements while returning attention to the unresolved expectations. The cost of changing plans is real; the consequences of entering an unwanted arrangement are also real. A decision should not be made solely by comparing which immediate event will produce less public discomfort.

Practical pressure and coercion should be distinguished. Disappointment, inconvenience, or persuasion may require difficult conversation. Threats, intimidation, deprivation, or forced compliance raise safety concerns. In those circumstances, use appropriate individual support and specialist assistance rather than a negotiation designed to make the person accept the wedding. The community's investment cannot give it ownership of either adult's consent.

Pausing with a defined purpose

A pause can create room to learn, obtain advice, or address a significant unresolved matter. It should have a clear purpose that the individuals understand. The couple may need to clarify where they will live, discuss a responsibility that was concealed, or consider whether a proposed adjustment is sustainable. Pausing should not be described as punishment. It is an

opportunity to respond to information before the commitment deepens.

State the concern specifically and identify what would help clarify it. “We need more counselling” may leave the couple unsure what should happen. “We need to understand how study, paid work, and care for relatives would fit into the proposed household” provides a practical focus. The next step might involve discussion, accurate information, or specialist advice. A guide should avoid prescribing a fixed number of meetings as if attendance alone resolves the matter.

Agree on a review point where appropriate, without promising that time will produce the preferred answer. The review should consider what has become clearer, what action has occurred, and what each person now wants. A deadline can organise work; it should not become a threat that the uncertain partner must marry by a particular date. Neither person is required to remain indefinitely in a proposal that they no longer wish to pursue.

Maintain reasonable boundaries during the pause. Decide how contact will occur, what public plans need to change, and what information will be shared with relatives. Avoid involving an expanding group of advisers who give contradictory instructions or demand private details. Some couples may benefit from a suitable independent guide. Others may already know that they

do not want to continue and should not be required to stage a pause before expressing that decision.

For Efe and Daniel, a useful pause might involve separate reflection on desired arrangements, a conversation about actual caregiving needs, and discussion with relatives about what assistance they have genuinely offered. The review would examine feasible options and whether both adults accept them. It would not simply ask whether Daniel has become more persuasive or whether Efe has learned to suppress her concern. Clarification needs to make the consequences visible.

Safety concerns require a different approach. A pause should not become an experiment in enduring threats while waiting for improvement. Where coercion or violence is reported, specialist guidance and appropriate safety support take priority. Do not promise that a brief course, apology, or cooling-off period establishes future safety. The educational process has limits, and acknowledging them is part of responsible guidance rather than an abandonment of hope.

Ending a proposed partnership with dignity

An informed ending may be the most responsible outcome of preparation. Two people can care for each other and still want incompatible lives. One may decide that significant information or conduct has changed their willingness to marry. Another may recognise that the relationship has continued mainly through

pressure. Ending the proposal does not require proving that one person has no worth. It requires communicating the decision and addressing relevant responsibilities appropriately.

Where communication is safe, be clear enough to avoid false hope. A person can explain that they do not wish to proceed without debating every aspect of the relationship indefinitely. They may identify a central incompatibility or say that their decision has changed after reflection. Compassion does not require offering a future promise merely to soften the present answer. The other person's disappointment deserves care, but it does not confer a right to overturn the refusal.

If there are threats, harassment, or fear of retaliation, avoid assuming that a private face-to-face meeting is the proper way to end the relationship. Seek appropriate support and consider safe communication arrangements with relevant specialists. Do not tell someone that an ending is valid only if delivered in a setting that increases danger. Where urgent risk arises, obtain appropriate emergency help in the person's location. Safety should shape the method of communication.

Practical matters may include gifts, shared expenses, bookings, belongings, documents, or responsibilities involving children. Requirements and disputes may need qualified advice in the relevant jurisdiction. Avoid universal claims about what must be returned or who owes which payment. A pastor or parent should

not invent a binding financial settlement simply because they are respected. The relationship decision and the resolution of practical obligations may require different forms of assistance.

Agree, where feasible, on a brief public explanation that preserves privacy. “We have decided not to proceed with the wedding” may be sufficient. Relatives may need logistical information without receiving intimate histories. Avoid using social media to humiliate a former partner or recruiting a congregation to enforce reconciliation. If one person behaves harmfully after the ending, address that conduct through appropriate support rather than treating the harassment as proof of passionate love.

Allow time and support for grief. A chosen ending can still involve sadness, loneliness, disrupted plans, and concern about family reactions. Friends, pastoral care, or suitable professional help may support the adjustment. Do not assume that grief proves the decision was wrong. Likewise, do not use immediate matchmaking to prevent the person from experiencing loss. They can decide later whether and how they wish to pursue another relationship.

Proceeding through a clear mutual commitment

When both people choose to proceed, ask them to explain what they are agreeing to in practical terms. They need not reproduce identical words. Each should nevertheless understand the main

commitments and the arrangements that matter to the proposed life. A shared decision is stronger when neither person must discover the central conditions only after the ceremony. Agreement should include an understanding of what remains uncertain and how further decisions will be made.

Prepare a concise record of important understandings if both find it useful. It might cover the intended home, work and study plans, responsibilities to dependants, financial participation, personal boundaries, and ways to seek support. This is an educational planning note, not a substitute for legal advice or a contract that authorises control over another person. Its value lies in making expectations visible and giving the couple a reference for later discussion.

Describe who will do what rather than rely on broad declarations. “We will support my mother” needs explanation about time, money, visits, and care. “We will decide together” needs an approach when preferences differ. “We will respect privacy” needs clarity about family disclosures and digital access. Chapter 8's ordinary-week exercise helps test whether several reasonable promises can be carried out together without placing an unacknowledged burden on one person.

Include continuing consent and personal autonomy. A decision to marry does not surrender the right to raise a concern, refuse unwanted sexual contact, seek healthcare, or maintain

appropriate support. Commitment can involve substantial shared responsibilities while preserving dignity and participation. The couple should understand accountability as openness about relevant commitments, not unlimited monitoring of every message, movement, or purchase. Marriage should not be used to legitimise coercion.

Efe and Daniel may decide to proceed after agreeing on a home near Efe's study programme, a realistic contribution to his parents, and specific caregiving help that relatives have confirmed. They should also discuss what happens if that help becomes unavailable. Their agreement is meaningful because it addresses the actual conflict and its consequences. It remains reviewable when circumstances change; it is not evidence that every future challenge has been solved.

Accept that responsible commitment includes some uncertainty. A person can choose a partner while recognising that employment, health, or family circumstances may alter. The important distinction is between accepting ordinary uncertainty and ignoring present information that undermines the proposed arrangement. Confidence should be grounded in knowledge, willingness, and observed conduct, with realistic limits. A guide's blessing or certificate can accompany that decision without replacing its substance.

Planning the wedding around the marriage being formed

Once the decision is clear, organise the wedding in a way that supports the household rather than exhausts its resources and relationships. A ceremony may hold deep religious and cultural meaning. It can honour families and mark a serious commitment. Its scale should still be considered alongside housing, work, education, care, and other obligations. The celebration is part of the transition; it should not consume the practical foundation the couple will need afterwards.

Review commitments before confirming expenditure. Identify what is already paid, what remains optional, who is contributing, and whether a contribution carries expectations. A relative may generously offer support while also assuming authority over the guest list or the couple's future home. Clarify these conditions respectfully before relying on the contribution. Generosity becomes easier to receive when the parties understand what has and has not been agreed.

Use qualified advice where contracts, borrowing, property, or legal formalities create significant obligations. Requirements depend on the transaction and jurisdiction. Neither this book nor a counsellor's educational planning note establishes that a ceremony satisfies every legal requirement. Obtain current information from appropriate authorities or professionals.

Couples crossing national borders or with previous marital responsibilities may need particular clarification before assuming that an arrangement is valid or recognised elsewhere. Discuss how families will participate and how decisions will be coordinated. The couple can agree on which matters they wish to manage and where they welcome help. A designated contact may reduce conflicting instructions, provided that person has a clear role. Do not require the bride or groom to absorb every disagreement silently in order to appear grateful. Respectful boundaries during planning can model how the household will manage future family involvement.

A fictional couple, Njeri and Chidi, discovers that their planned celebration would leave them unable to meet their agreed housing costs. Their first response is embarrassment because friends expect an elaborate event. Revising the celebration may be disappointing, yet it can protect the daily life they are choosing. A smaller wedding does not diminish the dignity of the commitment. Guides and relatives can support the change by avoiding comparisons with wealthier households.

Keep a final opportunity to raise significant new information. Completing preparation does not make later disclosure irrelevant. A material change in a commitment, an unresolved legal question, or a threat still deserves attention even when the date is near. The process should not close simply because public

arrangements have become difficult to alter. Wedding momentum must remain answerable to the adults' informed willingness and the actual conditions of the marriage.

Preparing for the first months of shared life

The first months can make previously abstract arrangements concrete. Someone who promised to help with care now faces appointments and transport. A person who expected regular companionship discovers the partner's shift pattern. Domestic tasks take time, and relatives may make requests the couple did not anticipate. Plan for a period of learning without assuming that every adjustment indicates failure or that every harmful act should be excused as normal settling in.

Begin with a manageable picture of daily life. Identify essential tasks, work schedules, rest, personal time, and shared responsibilities. The plan need not regulate every hour. It should make visible the work necessary for the household to function and who is expected to notice, organise, and perform it. Chapter 8 showed why unpaid coordination matters. An arrangement is incomplete if one person is assigned permanent responsibility for reminding the other.

Use the connected view of family life in Preventive Life Design to plan for the first months (Adetunji, 2026b, Chapter 4). For example, a change in work hours may affect care, finances and rest at the same time.

Choose an initial review time that suits the couple's circumstances. They might discuss what is working after a few weeks and revisit the plan when an important change occurs. There is no universal schedule that ensures success. The conversation can ask what has become harder than expected, whether responsibilities are fairly shared, and which agreement needs adjustment. A review should lead to action where necessary rather than become a ritual of reporting satisfaction.

Protect space for personal adjustment. Marriage may change routines, friendships, proximity to relatives, and access to familiar support. One partner may need quiet after work while the other expects immediate conversation. Such needs can be discussed without assuming rejection. Continuing appropriate friendships and family contact can provide support, with boundaries around private household matters. A spouse should not have to become the only available source of companionship, guidance, and practical assistance.

When a serious concern emerges, respond according to its nature. Fatigue about an unfamiliar routine may need adjustment and help. Persistent intimidation, coercion, or violence requires appropriate safety support and specialist assistance. Do not label every difficulty a communication problem or advise endurance simply because the marriage is new. Early help should be

available without requiring the couple to protect the appearance that preparation produced a trouble-free beginning.

Managing distance, relocation and existing family responsibilities

Some marriages begin with distance, relocation, or major changes in support. The couple may have spent little ordinary time together before the ceremony. They may move into a household with relatives, or one partner may join children from an earlier relationship. These circumstances deserve deliberate planning because they change what the first months require. Marriage does not instantly produce familiarity with every routine, family relationship, or local service.

For partners who have prepared mainly online, review what each expects when sharing physical space. Discuss work, household tasks, personal time, visitors, and access to support. Allow learning without treating every difference as deception. At the same time, significant concealed information should not be dismissed as something the newcomer must accept. Familiarity can grow through respectful daily participation, but it should not depend on surrendering one's voice or personal documents.

Relocation planning should consider practical dependence. How will the arriving partner obtain transport, communicate with trusted people, understand important documents, and seek assistance? What employment or study arrangements are

actually available? Current immigration and professional requirements need appropriate verification. Avoid treating departure from the country of origin as the end of the person's independent support. A new home should be accompanied by reliable information and access to suitable services.

Existing children need arrangements that attend to their needs and histories. Adults should clarify caregiving roles, schooling, financial responsibilities, and contact with other caregivers, obtaining qualified advice about relevant legal matters. A child should not be expected to demonstrate instant affection to reassure the new spouse. Nor should marriage become a reason to recruit the child into adult disputes. Transitions require care and realistic expectations about how trust develops.

A fictional couple, Amina and Peter, plans for Amina to relocate with her son. Peter has imagined an immediate parental role, while the child has an established relationship with another caregiver. The adults need to discuss routines, authority, communication, and appropriate limits before the move. Peter can contribute to care without demanding immediate emotional allegiance. Amina's marriage decision also needs to account for arrangements that affect her child, rather than treating his adjustment as a later detail.

Where relatives share the home, clarify space, responsibilities, privacy, and the intended duration of the arrangement. A

temporary stay can become indefinite if expectations remain unspoken. Housing limitations may restrict options, but they do not remove the need for discussion. The couple should know what decisions are theirs, what belongs to the host household, and where further support can be sought if the arrangement becomes unworkable.

Keeping access to help after the ceremony

Preparation should end with a usable support plan. Identify whom the individuals can contact for ordinary guidance, practical help, professional questions, and urgent concerns. Confirm that the contacts are appropriate and currently available. A list of names is insufficient if no one knows how to obtain an appointment or whether the service is affordable. Chapter 9's referral principles continue to matter after marriage, particularly when circumstances or location change.

Agree on how private household matters will be shared. A couple can seek support without broadcasting every disagreement to relatives or social media. Discuss what information is needed for the purpose and who can be trusted to handle it responsibly. However, an agreement about privacy must not prohibit disclosure of harm or access to assistance. Protecting the household's dignity should never require a person to remain isolated when they are unsafe.

Pastoral support can remain valuable when both understand its purpose and limits. Prayer, reflection, and encouragement may accompany clinical care, specialist assistance, or legal advice as appropriate. The pastor should not become the automatic decision-maker whenever the couple differs. Likewise, parents can offer care without assuming permanent control of the household. Continuing support works best when roles are clear and the adults retain meaningful participation in their own decisions.

Discuss how to ask for help before shame makes the request difficult. A person may fear that seeking assistance will expose a failed promise or disappoint a guide who endorsed the marriage. Programmes should communicate that help remains available when life becomes difficult. The aim of preparation is responsible learning, not an obligation to appear permanently successful. A couple should not need to protect a counsellor's reputation before acknowledging that an arrangement needs attention.

Where a partner refuses joint assistance, the other may still seek appropriate individual support. They need not wait until both agree before obtaining help for their own needs or safety. The provider should clarify the service and confidentiality arrangements rather than covertly treat the absent partner.

Individual guidance can help a person understand options while leaving responsibility for another adult's conduct with that adult. Urgent concerns require suitable action in the person's location. Threats of harm, severe distress, or immediate danger should not wait for the next routine review. Use appropriate professional or emergency assistance and relevant safeguarding procedures. This book cannot supply a universal crisis plan for every setting. The couple and their guides should know how locally available services can be accessed and review that information after relocation or other significant change.

Renewing agreements as life changes

An agreement made before marriage belongs to the circumstances in which it was understood. Employment, health, parenting, education, or caring responsibilities may later change those circumstances. Reviewing the agreement does not automatically mean that someone has become unreliable. It can mean that the original plan no longer fits the demands placed on the household. Responsibility includes acknowledging this change and discussing what can now be sustained.

Describe the change and its effects. A new job may increase income while reducing time available for care. An illness may require transport, appointments, and temporary redistribution of work. A relative's death may alter financial and emotional responsibilities. Consider the whole arrangement rather than

adding each demand to the person who already carries most tasks. A household can appear cooperative while relying on one adult's unacknowledged exhaustion.

Review participation as well as workload. Does each person still have access to relevant information, their own documents, and appropriate support? Can they request an adjustment without being shamed for changing an earlier promise? An arrangement remains more workable when the burden can be discussed openly. A promise to contribute does not require continuing beyond one's actual capacity while the other person refuses any reconsideration.

Use the communication practices developed earlier. State the concern clearly, hear its meaning, consider practical options, and identify who will act. If a conversation becomes insulting or unproductive, an agreed pause may help when both are safe. Return to the matter rather than use the pause to avoid it indefinitely. For recurring difficulties, seek suitable support instead of assuming that repeating the same discussion more loudly will produce a different result.

Preserve room for personal development. A spouse may discover a new educational goal, change work, or revise a view through experience. Discuss the implications for shared commitments without treating development as betrayal. At the same time, significant decisions affecting the other person's life

require relevant information and consideration. Growth and accountability can coexist. The useful question is how the proposed change would be understood and managed by both people.

There is no arrangement that eliminates every future conflict. A couple can nevertheless practise truthful communication, fair participation, care, and timely help. They can recognise when an issue exceeds their present resources and when safety requires another response. The habits developed in preparation are worth carrying forward because marriage remains a lived relationship. An initial decision begins that work; it does not finish the learning needed for every later season.

Choosing with understanding and living with responsibility

The purpose of this book is to help people enter a serious commitment with greater awareness of themselves, their partner, and the life they intend to form. It asks partners to slow down where important knowledge is missing and to take significant concerns seriously. It also respects the hope that draws people towards marriage. Careful preparation can make that hope more concrete by connecting affection and conviction with understood responsibilities.

The soldier's story at the beginning of this book captures the wish for another chance to act. Premarital education can give people an earlier chance to ask a question or reconsider a plan.

Even careful preparation leaves uncertainty. People and circumstances change, and wrongdoing remains the responsibility of the person who causes harm.

For singles, the invitation is to learn about the actual person and proposed life rather than rely entirely on introductions, profiles, public approval, or wedding momentum. For parents, it is to offer wisdom while allowing adults to decide. For pastors and counsellors, it is to create a setting where truth, uncertainty, and refusal can be expressed without humiliation. The quality of guidance becomes visible in how those moments are handled.

A couple choosing to marry should be able to say, in their own words, what they understand, what they willingly accept, and where they will seek help. A couple choosing to pause should know what the pause is for. A person choosing to part should have access to appropriate support and a safe way to communicate the decision. Each outcome can reflect responsible use of what preparation has revealed.

Before the wedding, make room for an honest decision. After it, keep discussing how you share responsibilities, seek support and adapt to change. Those daily choices give meaning to the commitment made at the ceremony.

Learning activities and discussion

1. Individually describe why you want this particular partnership, what you understand about the proposed life, and what remains uncertain.
2. Identify three important assumptions. State what supports each one and what clarification is still needed.
3. Review a significant relational difference. Distinguish the positions involved, the consequences, promises made, and actions observed.
4. Examine pressures connected with the wedding, family expectations, age, relocation, or past investment. Which pressures are influencing the decision?
5. If considering a pause, identify its purpose, next steps, and a suitable review point without promising a particular outcome.
6. Prepare a concise educational planning note covering the proposed home, responsibilities, participation in decisions, personal boundaries, and support. Seek qualified advice for any legal or clinical question.
7. Describe an ordinary week after marriage and identify what would change if work, health, care, or income altered.
8. Prepare a current support plan appropriate to your location, including ordinary guidance, professional help, and urgent assistance.

9. Discuss how an ending or postponement could be communicated safely while protecting private information and addressing practical responsibilities.

10. Review the decision individually before confirming a shared answer. Each person should retain freedom to proceed, request time, or decline the proposed partnership.

Use these activities to reflect on what you understand and which decisions or questions need further attention.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Choosing a marriage partner deserves more preparation than planning a wedding. *Before You Say I Do* helps readers move beyond attraction, family approval and assumptions towards an informed understanding of the person and partnership they are considering.

Written for contemporary African singles, parents, pastors and marriage counsellors, this book explores self-awareness, family history, compatibility, communication, health, intimacy, finances and parenthood. It also addresses introductions, online relationships, distance and family expectations. Through practical questions and relatable examples, it helps prospective spouses recognise significant differences, seek appropriate guidance and decide whether to proceed, pause or part.

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