

# The 36 Questions that Lead to Love

Research has revealed that a very powerful predictor of relationship stability is whether couples spend time getting to know each other or not. One way to do this is to ask open-ended questions. An open-ended question is a question that can't be answered by a simple "yes" or "no." It is a question such as, "How would you like our life to change in the next five years?"

*The ultimate goal is to change the way the two of you "move through time" together.*

There's a classic study from 1997 which explores whether closeness can be created by means of asking each other a specific series of questions. This was later referenced in an essay by Mandy Len Carton entitled, "To Fall in Love With Anyone, Do This" and Daniel Jones's 2015 New York Times article, "The 36 Questions that Lead to Love".

The primary theory behind all of this is that **mutual vulnerability fosters closeness**. Since being vulnerable with another person can be very uncomfortable, using an exercise like this can help to enhance a greater connection. There are three sets of questions, each more involved than the other.

## Instructions

Sit facing each other holding a copy of the questions below. Have one person pick a question, reading it out loud, and answering it out loud (the other partner is silent up through this point). Your partner can then say one of two things:

- "Yes, that's right," or
- "No, good try. Here's the right answer..."

If it doesn't make sense, ask more open-ended questions. If you already know the answer, ask more open-ended questions so that you can become an expert on understanding why your partner's answer is what it is (unless it is simply a factual answer). The goal of both of these is to **become an expert on each other's inner-world**. Then trade roles; it's the other person's turn to pick a question, say it out loud, and answer it out loud themselves. You should spend at least five minutes per question (both partners asking and answering).

*The specific goal of this exercise is to become an expert on each other's "inner world".*

The goal is to be curious, be positive, and be able to understand your partner's answers as if they were your own. Then keep alternating in this way. Mark off the questions you've asked to help

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keep track. Do not do more than 5 questions at once! Your goal is to spread this out evenly throughout the week. You will not be able to answer them all before your next session; this is to be expected.

Make sure that you do not rush with these questions! The goal is quality, not quantity. If one of the questions is, “What is your favorite color?” and you answer “Green,” make certain to follow up: “Why is this your favorite color? Tell me more about the story behind this.” In essence, depth matters.

## Questions – Part 1

- Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
- Would you like to be famous? In what way?
- Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
- What would constitute a “perfect” day for you?
- When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
- If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
- Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
- Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
- If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
- Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
- If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

## Questions – Part 2

- If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?
- Is there something that you’ve dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?
- What is the greatest accomplishment of your life? 16. What do you value most in a friendship?
- What is your most treasured memory?
- What is your most terrible memory?
- If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
- What does friendship mean to you?
- What roles do love and affection play in your life?

- Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
- How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
- How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

## Questions — Part 3

- Make three true “we” statements each. For instance, “We are both in this room feeling ... “
- Complete this sentence: “I wish I had someone with whom I could share ... “
- If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
- Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
- Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
- When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
- Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
- What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
- If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
- Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
- Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
- Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.