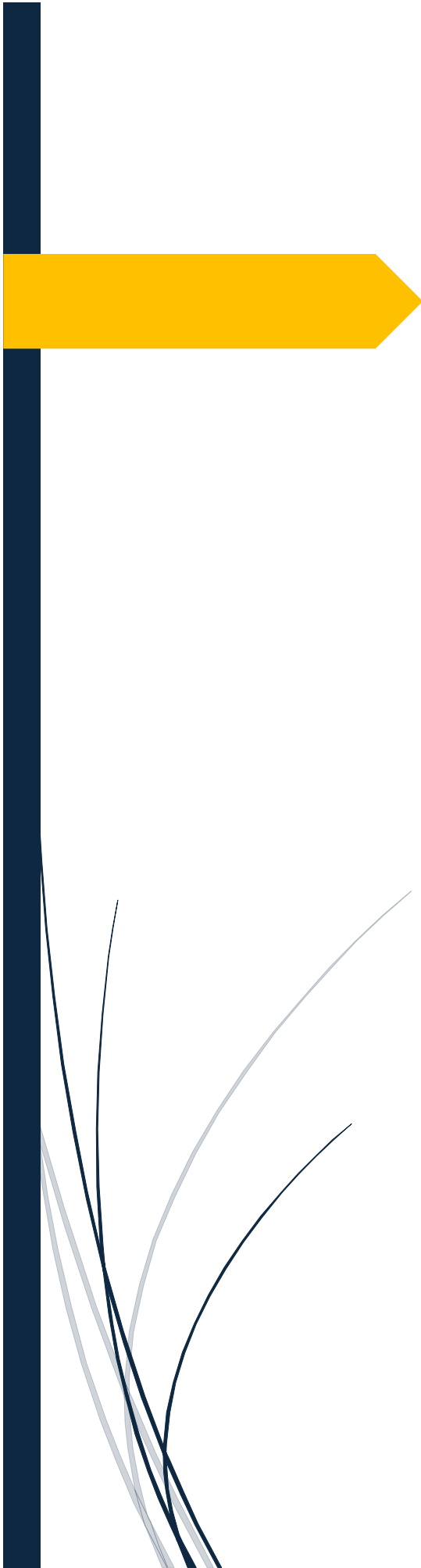




What Matters to US

Understanding Your Values,
Your Partner's Values, and
What You Want to Build
Together

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Every relationship brings together two different people. You each arrive with your own: Values. Priorities. Families. Experiences. Beliefs. Cultures. Expectations. Traditions. Ideas about relationships. Definitions of what a good life looks like.

Some will overlap. Some won't.

The goal isn't to become the same person or agree about everything.

It's to understand: **What matters to ME? What matters to YOU?**

And what do we want to matter to US?

Values Are More Than Words

Values help describe what matters to us and how we want to live.

You might value:

- Family. Security. Adventure. Independence. Connection. Achievement. Stability.
- Faith. Growth. Honesty. Loyalty. Fun. Health. Community.
- Tradition. Creativity. Freedom. Service. Learning. Financial security. Intimacy.

But identifying the word is only the beginning.

Two people can choose the **same value** and mean very different things.

FAMILY

- One partner: **"Our household and children come first."**
- Another: **"Staying connected with our extended family is extremely important."**

SECURITY

- One partner: **"We should save aggressively and prepare for the future."**
- Another: **"I need consistency, predictability, and to know we're okay."**

INDEPENDENCE

- One partner: **"It's important that we maintain our own friendships and interests."**
- Another: **"I don't want to feel like I have to check in about everything I do."**

Same word. Different meaning.

That's why the conversation can't stop at: **"What are your values?"**

Go further.

VALUE → MEANING → BEHAVIOR

For an important value, ask:

- What does this value mean to me?
- Why does it matter?
- Where did I learn it?
- What does it look like when I'm living it?
- What behaviors communicate this value to me?
- What happens inside me when I feel this value isn't being respected?

For example:

VALUE: CONNECTION

- **Meaning:**
Feeling emotionally close and important to one another.

Behavior:

Spending intentional time together, talking about more than logistics, affection, checking in.

Another person could also value **connection** but experience it through:

- Shared activities. Sex. Humor. Travel. Working on projects. Being physically nearby.

Don't assume the same word means the same thing.

Get curious.

Start With ME

Before deciding what **we** should value, each partner needs some understanding of themselves.

Ask individually:

- What matters most to me?
- What do I want my life to stand for?
- What characteristics do I want to embody?
- What do I want my relationships to feel like?
- What values influence how I spend my time?
- What values influence how I spend money?
- What matters to me about family?
- What did my family teach me was important?

Then consider: **Which values are truly mine and which ones did I inherit?**

You don't have to reject what you inherited.

Just know where it came from.

Now Get Curious About YOU

Sharing values isn't an opportunity to persuade your partner. The first job is to **understand**.

When your partner shares something important, resist the urge to immediately:

- Explain
- Correct
- Compare
- Defend
- Challenge
- Negotiate
- Problem-solve

Instead: **LISTEN → UNDERSTAND → REFLECT → VALIDATE**

Try:

- "Tell me more about why that matters to you."
- "What does that look like for you?"
- "Where do you think that comes from?"
- "What happens for you when that feels threatened?"

Then reflect: **"What I'm hearing is that _____ matters to you because _____. Did I get that right?"**

Understanding doesn't require agreement.

It simply means: **I understand why this matters to you.**

Don't Rush the Gap

Eventually you'll discover differences. That's normal.

One partner values: **STABILITY**. The other: **ADVENTURE**. One: **SAVING**. The other: **EXPERIENCES**. One: **INDEPENDENCE**. The other: **TOGETHERNESS**. One: **CAREER**. The other: **FAMILY TIME**. One: **TRADITION**. The other: **CHANGE**

Difference isn't automatically incompatibility. Before asking: **"How do we fix this?"** ask: **"Can we understand this?"**

Map the Values

Not every difference means the same thing. It can help to sort what you're discovering.

SHARED = We value essentially the same thing and generally agree about what it means.

- Examples: Trust. Health. Financial stability. Family. Growth.

COMPLEMENTARY = We value different things, but those differences can strengthen our system.

- Examples: Planning + Spontaneity. Stability + Adventure. Independence + Connection. Caution + Optimism

The difference may give the relationship more range.

NEGOTIABLE = Both values matter, but they sometimes compete with Time. Money. Energy. Attention. Resources.

- Examples: Saving + Travel. Career + Family Time. Extended Family + Couple Time. Togetherness + Independence

The question becomes: **How do we make room for both?**

FRICTION = Some differences create significant or recurring tension.

- Maybe around: Children. Religion. Money. Monogamy. Sex. Substance use. Politics. Where to live. Family involvement. Career priorities. Lifestyle.

These differences deserve more attention not necessarily because someone is wrong, but because they may influence the kind of life you're trying to build.

Difference Doesn't Require a Winner

Imagine:

- **ME + Security** = *"I want us to protect our future."*
- **YOU + Adventure** = *"I don't want us to postpone living our life."*

The argument can become: **"You're cheap."** versus **"You're irresponsible."**

Now the people are the problem.

Instead: **Something important to me is colliding with something important to you.**

That's a different conversation.

Maybe the answer isn't: **SECURITY wins**. Or **ADVENTURE wins**.

Maybe the relationship develops: **US: INTENTIONAL EXPERIENCE**

"We protect our financial foundation while deliberately creating room for experiences."

Neither partner disappears. Something new gets created.

ME → YOU → WE → US

Values can move through the relationship.

- ME = What matters to me?
- YOU = What matters to you?
- WE = Where do we overlap, complement one another, negotiate, or experience friction?
- US = What do we deliberately want our relationship to stand for?

US doesn't require abandoning ME or YOU.

It's something you create together.

Build Relationship Values

After understanding your individual values, ask: **What do we want to protect and cultivate in this relationship?**

Maybe:

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| • Trust | • Honesty | • Independence |
| • Curiosity | • Play | • Connection |
| • Reliability | • Family | • Learning |
| • Adventure | • Health | • Service |
| • Affection | • Generosity | • Repair |
| • Growth | • Financial responsibility | |

Then narrow the list If everything is a priority, nothing is really a priority.

Consider choosing **3–5 relationship values** that describe the kind of relationship you're intentionally trying to build.

Turn Values Into Behavior

A value becomes much more useful when you know what it looks like. What the behavior is.

VALUE: CONNECTION

- Create intentional time together
- Talk about more than logistics
- Show affection
- Stay curious about one another

VALUE: ADVENTURE

- Try new things
- Travel when possible
- Say yes sometimes when staying home would be easier

VALUE: FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Discuss major purchases
- Know what's happening with our money
- Save toward shared priorities

VALUE: RESPECT

- Don't use contempt
- Allow disagreement
- Listen before responding
- Respect boundaries
- Repair when we miss

Ask: **"If someone watched our relationship, what behaviors would tell them this value matters to us?"**

That's where values become our culture.

Values Will Compete

Even shared values can collide

- Family versus career
- Security versus opportunity
- Saving versus generosity
- Rest versus achievement
- Independence versus connection
- Parenting versus couple time
- Health versus convenience

There won't always be a perfect answer The goal isn't to eliminate competing values.

It's to recognize: **Which values are asking for our attention right now?**

Then make the decision intentionally.

Values Can Change

What mattered most at 25 may not be what matters most at 45.

Values and priorities can shift through:

- Marriage
- Children
- Career changes
- Illness
- Loss
- Financial changes
- Aging
- Relocation
- Changing beliefs
- Success
- Failure
- Life experience

That doesn't necessarily mean someone changed the rules It may mean: **The people and the system changed.**

Keep talking. Shared values shouldn't become a contract used against one another.

They should be a **living description of the relationship you're trying to create.**

When Values Become Conflict

If the same argument keeps returning, look underneath the position

- The argument may sound like: "**You work too much**" might be: **CONNECTION vs ACHIEVEMENT**
- The argument: "**You spend too much money**" might contain: **SECURITY vs EXPERIENCE**
- The argument: "**Your family is always involved**" might contain: **COUPLE BOUNDARIES vs FAMILY CONNECTION**
- The argument: "**You never want to go anywhere**" might contain: **STABILITY vs ADVENTURE**

Instead of only debating the behavior, ask: "**What matters to each of us underneath this?**"

Sometimes understanding the value underneath the position changes the entire conversation.

DO MORE / DO LESS

DO MORE

- Get curious about what matters to your partner.
- Explain what your values mean instead of assuming they're obvious.
- Ask where values came from.
- Listen before negotiating.
- Look underneath recurring disagreements.
- Separate differences from character judgments.
- Notice complementary differences.
- Make room for two things to matter.
- Translate values into observable behavior.
- Develop relationship values together.
- Revisit values as life changes.

DO LESS

- Assuming your partner means what you mean.
- Treating different values as wrong values.
- Debating before understanding.
- Using values as weapons.
- Trying to convince your partner that your priorities are more legitimate.
- Calling differences incompatibility too quickly.
- Assuming compromise always means splitting something 50/50.
- Allowing inherited expectations to operate without discussion.
- Creating an US that requires either ME or YOU to disappear.

The Bottom Line

You don't need identical values to build a meaningful relationship.

You need to understand: **What matters to ME. What matters to YOU.** Where those things fit and where they don't.

Then decide: **What do we want to matter to US?**

Some values will be shared. Some will complement one another. Some will require negotiation. Some will create friction. And occasionally, a difference may be significant enough that there isn't an easy resolution.

The goal isn't to eliminate every difference. It's to be able to say: **"I understand what matters to you. You understand what matters to me. Now let's decide what we want to build together"**