

"This book is destined to become ~THE~ Marriage Preparation Manual."

Melodie Tucker, Mars Venus Success Coach

All-in-One Marriage Prep

75 Experts Share Tips & Wisdom
to Help You Get Ready Now



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Gender Equality in Marriage

Susanne M. Alexander

The topic of equality is complex and filled with various emotions and attitudes on the part of both men and women. It has an effect on your relationship now, and it certainly will affect your marriage. Just stop and think about any discussions you've had about who pays for what, who holds the door open for the other, and who (if either of you) will stay home with the kids, and you know how true this is. Consider, too, are you waiting for the man to propose to the woman, or does equality include making a mutual decision or the woman initiating the possibility of marriage?

What Is Equality? We can define equality as respecting the balanced partnership between two people who work together and honor each other as worthy team members. Practicing equal partnership means that neither of you unilaterally takes control or dictates to the other. You must pay attention to the principle of justice when making decisions together about who does what in your marriage and family and why. For instance, in some marriages, it is a common pattern for couples to begin on an equal footing with education, career, and financial earning ability. However, when children come, sometimes unjust patterns may begin. Often, the wife makes a greater sacrifice of her leisure time, professional accomplishments, and personal fulfillment. And being a mother is not a lesser role; rather, it is a vital one.

Creating Equality To achieve gender balance, men must be willing to try new actions and ways of treating and interacting with women that do not oppress their minds, hearts, and spirits. They must become champions of equality with women, encouraging and praising their roles, abilities, and qualities. Men have attitudes and habits to change so that they can help create climates that are welcoming to women. Women must also behave with assertiveness and self-respect in claiming their rightful place as full participants in family and society. Each of you can choose to speak with respect, avoiding demeaning, belittling, or insulting the other. Men who truly respect women and think of them as equals actually gain the most. Women who feel respected are more likely to help men achieve their highest potential.

One of the vital purposes of equality of the sexes in marriage is to create a balance of mutual thoughtfulness and shared power in the division of rights and work within your household. If you want to achieve equality in your marriage, it means that the man must try new tasks and responsibilities. Women, in return, learn to respect and accept his efforts as valid, even when he performs actions differently than she might expect. Both of you may need to learn new ways of interacting and accomplishing the tasks required in your home and family. You must both speak up when either of you feels you are not receiving equitable treatment and request new actions and attitudes instead. The key is to mutually discuss and

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create a plan together for how you will approach what needs to be done rather than making assumptions or dictating to each other.

Equality does not mean sameness; men and women are complements of each other. The most obvious differences are physical, and these will lead to some gender-specific roles, such as carrying and giving birth to a child. However, gender differences can also affect how men and women process and express thoughts and emotions. The different ways they approach issues, communicate, experience emotions, and interpret eye contact are complex subjects that have been the objects of many scientific and psychological studies.

As one example, sometimes the woman may assume the man is lying or avoiding an issue when he looks away during conversation. In fact, it might be that he is trying to calm and de-escalate the discussion. Many women feel intimacy from direct eye contact, whereas men often see it as an aggressive stance. (See *Why Men Won't Talk to Women and What To Do About It* by Paul McWilliams as a resource on this topic.) In exploring this and other differences, the key is to see those differences as areas to understand and accommodate, not necessarily that you are showing disrespect to each other.

Checking for Effectiveness Below is a brief checklist to help you recognize when you are being *effective* at practicing equality:

- Communicates thoughts and feelings and encourages others to do the same
- Listens carefully to others and respects their point of view
- Honors the participation of others
- Regards both others and themselves as valuable human beings with diverse, valuable contributions to make
- Determines with others in a fair and equitable manner their roles and how they will handle joint responsibilities
- Discusses issues and makes decisions in partnership with others as appropriate and whenever possible
- Learns new skills to increase balance between others and themselves

This next list gives you some warning indications of when you are being *less effective* at practicing equality:

- Gives orders to, makes demands of, or tries to dominate or control others
- Acts as if they are superior or inferior to another or bases interactions on bias, prejudice, or stereotypes
- Expects others to do their fair share of tasks for them
- Insists that everyone's roles and responsibilities be identical or divided along unexamined traditional roles
- Holds back important information, thoughts, or feelings related to a discussion or decision, perhaps devaluing them and thinking they are not really valuable or legitimate or that others are not capable of understanding

Relationship Coaching

1. It is easy to become overly sensitive to the issue of equality and to verbally react or to become defensive and upset when you perceive someone has behaved toward you in an unfair, unequal manner. Take a deep breath, reflect, and discuss the situation together. Remember, you are both learning, and neither of you is likely to be 100 percent right—or 100 percent wrong. Search for the truth as a team together.
2. One way to explore equality in a relationship and marriage is to observe and better understand the relationship your parents had/have. Parents are the first teachers of attitudes and behavior toward the opposite gender.
3. Reflect on your pasts to explore how your behavior and attitudes about equality (both positive and negative) formed through experiences with parents, siblings, friends, and previous romantic relationships/marriage(s). Consider how you treat other people (possibly inequitably) based on such factors as physical appearance, intelligence, culture, race, and monetary factors, as well as gender.
4. You may find it useful to involve family, friends, and peers in discussing what roles and responsibilities you will each have in your future home. These discussions may challenge you to consider new perspectives and choices. They may also assist you in understanding where you are struggling in practicing equality-related behavior. For instance, it may take time for a man to accept that sharing housework does not diminish his masculinity, and doing housework is not a “favor” he is doing for his wife. A woman may also take time to understand that repairing an appliance does not make her less feminine, nor is it a “favor” she is doing for her husband. You are both simply doing the acts of service that move your family forward.
5. If you marry, the household tasks you will each perform will likely shift and change depending on your family’s needs, service commitments, work schedules, health, and more. The balance of sharing between you may become unfair without your realizing it. It will help you to prevent this if you ask yourselves at the end of each day, “Was today a partnership?” or “Were we equitable today?” and “What will we do differently tomorrow to create a balance of equality?”

Susanne M. Alexander is a Relationship and Marriage Coach. She thinks marriages are still in the early stages of practicing equality and hopes her grandchildren will be much better at it than her great grandparents were! (www.marriagetransformation.com)

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Creating Your Marriage Commitments

Susanne M. Alexander

Craig and I were fairly certain we could have a happy marriage. However, we were coming out of unhappy marriages and divorces and clear we wanted to take a marriage together in a new direction. We also wanted to be sure we were in agreement about what this potential new marriage would look like. Over a few weeks, we wrote down and discussed what we were committed to doing if we married.

As we discussed what was important to both of us, we confirmed that we were a good match. We then shared the list with our parents and asked for their input. My mother added one item at the end to remind us that we wouldn't be perfect at all the rest of the commitments on the list.

As part of our wedding ceremony, we publicly read our marriage commitments out loud to our family and friends. Each year on our anniversary, we re-read them and assessed our progress. Where we fell short, we set goals for the coming year.

Over the years, we modified our original commitments list to create a lengthier and more general list for other couples to choose from or get ideas from. When you make your own list, please feel free to borrow from the ones below.

United in mind, heart, and soul, we affirm that the intent of our marriage is to create an extraordinary family. Our commitment is to:

- Be friends with each other and united in body, mind, heart, and soul.
- Treat others—and especially each other, family, and friends—with love, honor, respect, courtesy, and integrity.
- Help and encourage one another's personal growth and transformation and the spiritual transformation of others.
- Regularly, lovingly, and tactfully share any hurts or annoyances we are feeling using "I feel..." terms rather than "You do not..." language. Set up a regular time to share openly and honestly.
- Honor and respect our own and each other's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs and assist each other in meeting those needs in whatever way possible.
- Engage in physical and recreational activities together, particularly those that contribute to our physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Create an environment that encourages each of us to maintain a healthy physical lifestyle.
- Fully express and share all aspects of our selves and our lives at appropriate times.
- Nurture a spirit of community with others.
- Ensure that the marriage bond is our primary one, and we are faithful to it. Commit to addressing actively and wholeheartedly any attractions or feelings that arise for someone else, working to rekindle love for each other and our marriage commitment.
- Respond to issues that arise as quickly as possible, using consultative decision making as a tool in all matters.
- Be fully conscious, fully present with each other.
- Maintain some time alone for each of us as individuals.
- Ensure we spend time together as a couple on a regular basis.

- Cherish, honor, and respect our children by nurturing bonds of communication and love with them.
- Never argue in front of our children.
- Build and maintain loving and open relationships with all family members.
- Enrich our lives with separate and mutual friendships.
- Demonstrate and accept intimacy from one another regularly.
- Have regular family meetings, including children in the process for problem solving and planning.
- Pray and read scripture separately and together every day.
- Be involved in regular service to each other, our families, friends, and communities.
- Be playful, have fun, and incorporate humor into daily life.
- Choose to speak positive words about each other both to one another and to others.
- Hug and kiss one another every day.
- Act with integrity in all things, including in our finances, our work, and our service commitments.
- Engage in ongoing learning of new information and skills, as well as development of our characters and talents.
- Encourage each other's talents and skills.
- Compliment and praise one another and our children every day. Ensure that for any negative comment, three to five positive ones are offered.
- Enrich our lives with the arts.
- Limit our television or computer time to a moderate amount.
- Regularly participate in religious activities.
- Help one another through difficult times.
- Accompany each other in preparing for passing when end-of-lifetime arrives.
- Be patient, accepting, and nurturing, maintaining the constancy of our relationship through times of adversity and when we are not being our best selves.

What ones do you want to add?

Specifically writing down your intentions makes it more likely that you will fulfill them. There is significant power in commitment. This is one of the quotations that inspired us to make our commitments:

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.”¹

Commitment is a significant part of marriage. Being specific about what you are actually committed and intentional about creating within a marriage together has tremendous power.

1 W. H. Murray, *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*, pp. 6-7

Susanne M. Alexander is a Relationship and Marriage Coach. She loves watching and participating in the creative process that is released when people make commitments.
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About the Author

Susanne M. Alexander is a Relationship and Marriage Coach specializing in character and certified by PREPARE-ENRICH. She is President of Marriage Transformation LLC, a publishing and coaching company based in Cleveland, Ohio, (www.marriagetransformation.com). It has the mission of helping people create happy, lasting, character-based marriages. She is the author or co-author of:

- *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips and Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now*
- *Becoming an Excellent Person: Preparing Your Character for Dating, Courtship, and Marriage*
- *Becoming Relationship Ready: Preparing for a Future Partner*
- *Becoming Character Partners: Observing and Understanding Your Partner's Qualities*
- *Becoming Unified Partners: Assessing Harmony Between You and a Partner*
- *Empowered Healing: Creating Quality of Life While Journeying with Cancer*
- *Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship*
- *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*
- *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage*
- *Happy at Home, Happy at Work*
- *A Perfectly Funny Marriage* (cartoon book)

Susanne has conducted workshops for individuals and couples in the United States, Canada, and China. She has been quoted in or written articles published in: *Washington Woman, Marriage Partnership, Inc., Ladies Home Journal, Newsweek, Chicago Sun Times, The Washington Times, NBC Online, Yahoo.com Personals, Match.com, Hitched.com, ParentsConnect.com*, and more. Susanne is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. Susanne is a member of the Bahá'í Faith (www.bahai.org). She has one married daughter, three married stepchildren, and three grandchildren.

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