

5 Cue Cards for New Couples



By Christina Steinorth MA MFT

Here's a piece of folk wisdom nearly every newlywed has heard: "If you can survive the wedding, surviving the marriage will be a piece of cake!" Weddings are indeed stressful because they involve a massive amount of planning, cooperating/compromising with your spouse-to-be, the convergence of diverse family and friends, decisions about religion and family traditions, and of course, lots of money.

After the wedding, many newly married couples experience what social scientists call "the honeymoon phase"—a period of several months in the beginning of marriage, characterized by passionate love and intense happiness. But in my experience working with couples, I've found that new marriage also comes with new stressors.

To sail through the first few months of marriage with minimal problems, here are 5 Cue Cards, or quick behavioral prompts, to help you navigate around the most common obstacles to newlyweds' happiness.

Cue Card #1: Managing your own family is your job.

Even in well-adjusted and accommodating families, social slipups will occur. You or your spouse will inevitably get your feelings hurt by someone in your extended family or your partner's family. If your relative acts in a hurtful manner, it's your responsibility to address the issue with the offending family member and, if warranted, to ask that person to apologize to your spouse. When you manage your family, you show respect for your love partner.

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Cue Card #2: Keep disagreements between you.

When you have a disagreement with your spouse, one of the best things you can do for your marriage is to not talk about it with your family of origin. Families can be a wonderful source of support, but in new relationships it's essential for a couple to establish an identity that's separate from their respective families. This engenders trust in one another, strengthens your bond and helps you make decisions that are right for the two of you, free of outside meddling and the resentment that can create.

Cue Card #3: Establish your own family traditions.

When holidays come around, it's normal for new couples to grapple with whose family they'll visit, which traditions to adopt and how to juggle in-law demands. A good solution is to choose one holiday a year to establish your own tradition, and then alternate other holidays between families. This way, everyone gets to spend equal time with you. You can avoid the stress of having to travel to multiple holiday events. And it gives you an opportunity to create a holiday that's all your own—with the food, friends, fun and rituals you get to choose together.

Cue Card #4: Don't take it personally.

One of the best ways to get your marriage off to a good start is to practice this one behavior over and over, and master it: Pause before you take what he or she said personally—it's usually not about you. When your partner is angry, sullen, or rude, stop and ask yourself, "Did she/he do or say this to be mean or to hurt me?" It's not easy to do, but if you can get good at controlling your knee-jerk reaction, it gives both of you the opportunity to find out what's really going on, and to talk about it calmly and with genuine concern.

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Cue Card #5: Let unimportant things go.

Before you engage in an argument, try to stop for a moment and ask yourself, "How important is this?" It's inevitable that you'll get on each other's nerves. And it's common to want to control your partner's behavior. But try to put the issue into the context of your entire relationship and then pick your battles wisely. This single piece of advice will help you minimize the number of arguments you have, and you'll learn how to love each other for who you are and the way you are.

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