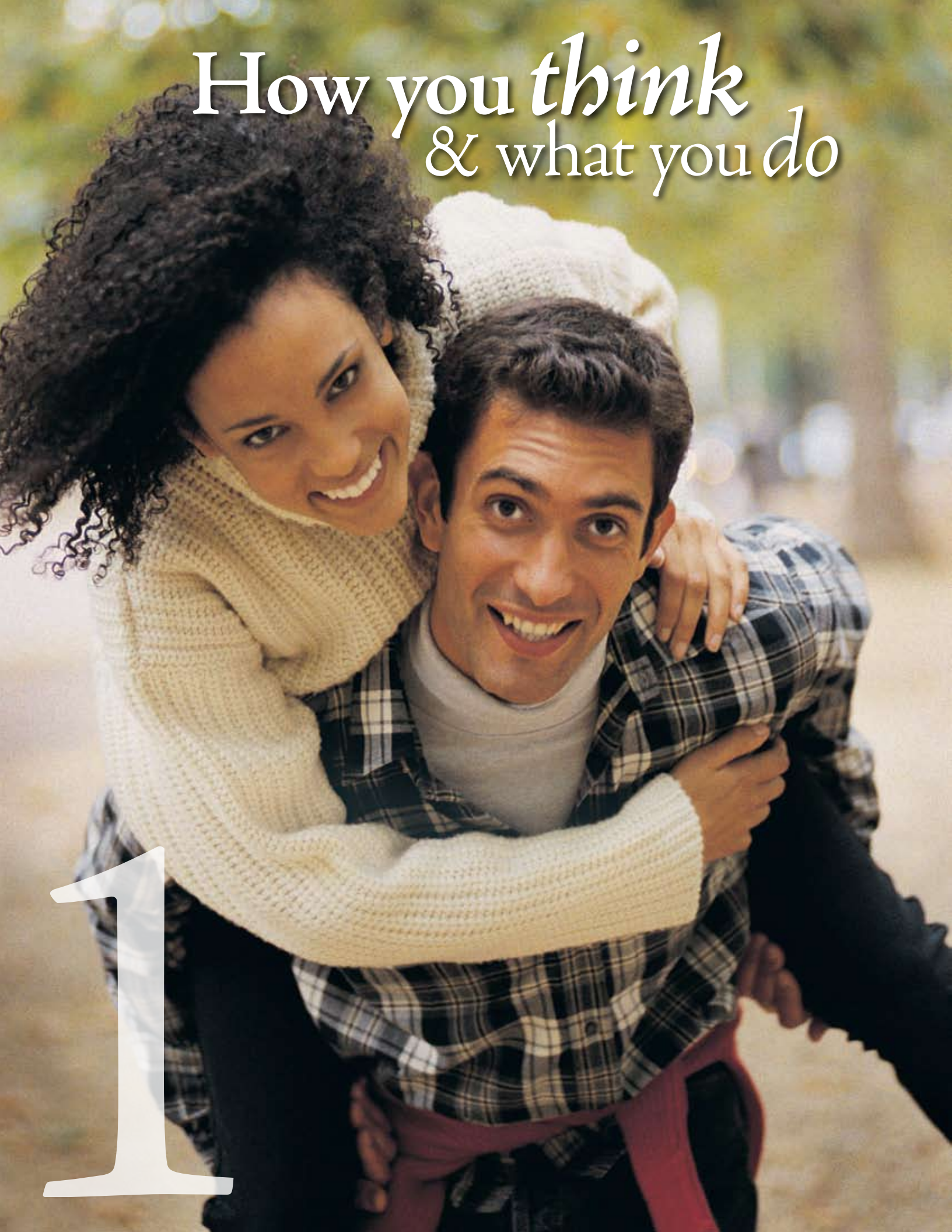


How you *think*
& what you *do*

1



How You Think

How you think affects the quality of your marriage. The *expectations* you have upon entering marriage, the *commitment* you make to your relationship as a couple, and having a *positive attitude* all have a great bearing on the success of your partnership.

❖ Expectations

People who enter marriage with unrealistic beliefs and unrealistic expectations often feel frustration, anger, and dissatisfaction when their expectations go unmet. On the other hand,

people who have more realistic expectations and who think about their partners in positive ways—often giving them the benefit of the doubt—have more satisfying marriages. Because no person is perfect, happiness in marriage is higher for a person who focuses on the positives rather than the negatives in his or her spouse and relationship.

Remember, too, that how you think about a situation can lead to how you *behave*. What do you expect in your marriage? What do you expect of your spouse? Have you thought about it?

Try this exercise.

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Indicate whether you think the following statements are true or false.	True	False
1. Because we are in love we should never disagree.		
2. My spouse should know what I'm thinking and feeling without my having to say it.		
3. My spouse will never change (for the better or for the worse).		
4. I will always feel those exciting, passionate feelings for my spouse.		

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If you thought, “These statements are unrealistic,” then you’re on track—they are all false. Research shows that people who strongly hold these expectations are usually less satisfied in their marriages.

In reference to number 1 above, having conflict is a *normal* part of being in a relationship with another human being. There’s nothing *wrong* with your marriage if you have disagreements. Skills for managing disagreements and conflict are very important for healthy relationships. Some recommendations are offered in the next section.

For number 2, although a few people might be quite good at it, mind-reading is a rare skill. A person can love you deeply and still not be able to know what you’re thinking or feeling.

For number 3, people can and do change and grow. And remember, when you hit some rough spots, in most cases, people can change for the better with support, love, and encouragement.

For number 4, long-lasting love experiences some highs and lows in passionate feelings. Mature love takes time to grow and is better described as strong feelings of connection, caring, and respect for the other person.

Marriage is much more than the happily ever after you see in the movies. All couples have differences and disagreements. The issue is not whether you have disagreements but how you manage them. Couples who stay together learn how to turn romantic, movie-star love into real, lasting, committed, mature love.

Tip #1 • Recognize any unrealistic expectations you may have.

People enter marriage with very specific expectations and beliefs about how things should work and who should do what. Have you talked about some of these? Complete this questionnaire separately, and then compare your answers. You might find some very interesting differences!

Tip #2 • Share your expectations with each other.



Who does the tasks listed below?	Husband Only	Wife Only	Husband w/ Wife	Wife w/ Husband	Both	Not Sure	Children
HOUSEHOLD TASKS							
Indoor (cleaning, dusting, etc.)							
Outdoor (lawn, garden, etc.)							
YOUTH & CHILD CARE (Present or Future)							
Teaches sex education							
Gives guidance and discipline							
Helps with school work							
Teaches family values							
Attends parent/teacher conferences							
FINANCES							
Does bookkeeping							
Pays bills							
Plans family budget							
DECISIONS							
When to purchase car							
When to remodel house							
How to spend family income							
When to have additional children							
SPIRITUALITY							
Decides level of church involvement							
Decides family spirituality practices							
Instructs children in beliefs							
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES							
Runs errands							
Grocery shops							
Maintains family car							
Transports children to school and activities							
MARITAL ROLES							
Initiates affection							
Initiates sex							
Resolves conflict							
Initiates recreation							
Initiates social activities							
Is spiritual leader							
Makes contact w/ husband's extended family							
Makes contact w/ wife's extended family							

❖ **Commitment – From Me to We**

Another important part of thinking in ways that lead to a healthy marriage is to adopt a *commitment attitude*, which means that you consider you and your spouse as part of the same team.

Tip #3 ♦ Think of you and your spouse as a team.

You're in this together now—and most people have lots of hurdles and challenges to face in life. If you think of yourselves as part of a team, you're more likely to behave in ways that make you feel more and more connected. You'll support each other when one of you faces a challenge. You'll make choices that build trust between the two of you.

Part of thinking as a team means talking about your expectations as well as your goals and purpose in coming together as a married couple. You and your spouse grew up in different families, have had different experiences, and think differently. Whether it be something as small as who you think should take out the trash or as large as deciding whether and when to have children, share with your spouse your expectations, hopes, and desires. Failure to talk about what's in your heart and mind can quickly lead to frustration and disappointment. The more agreement you and your spouse have in terms of your expectations and beliefs, the greater your chances for

harmony in your marriage. If you find that you and your spouse share very different views in any area, it may be wise to come to some sort of agreement that you are both comfortable with before you get married. Where there are differences, try to work for common ground. Keep in mind that in marriage, when one spouse loses, both lose. Strive for solutions that satisfy both members of your marriage “team.”

Think, too, about your broader goals. Many companies and organizations have a *mission statement*, which states their purpose, goals, and commitments to customers and employees. It's a good idea to do this for your marriage. Think about what you personally want in your mission statement. What do you as a couple believe, want, support, and value? With your spouse, discuss the questions at the bottom of the page (and think of some others), and see if you can come up with a mission statement for your marriage.

Tip #4 ♦ Establish a shared mission for your marriage.

Consider using this statement as a guide throughout your marriage. You may even want to hang it in a place where you and your spouse will regularly see it. From time to time, read it together and evaluate whether your daily behaviors, choices, and use of time are consistent with your commitment to one another.



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<p>What do we want out of this relationship?</p> <p>•</p> <p>How will we treat each other?</p> <p>•</p> <p>What will we do to keep our relationship strong?</p>	<p>Our Mission Statement</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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❖ Attitudes

People in healthy relationships and marriages focus on the positives and trust each other, giving the other person the benefit of the doubt.



Think about how you would respond in the following scenarios with your spouse, and then share your thoughts with him or her.



Your spouse leaves early for work without waking you and telling you goodbye.



You come home to a messy kitchen and find your spouse playing outside with the kids.



You have a 6:00 p.m. dinner date on the other side of town. It's now 5:45, and your spouse is still not home.



In each of these scenarios, you could easily choose to feel slighted, ignored, or frustrated. Was that your first instinct? Did you find that there's also a more *positive* way to think of each of the scenarios?



"How thoughtful that he didn't wake me!"
or
"She wanted me to rest as much as possible!"



"How wonderful that she takes time to nurture the children!"
or

"What a wonderful, involved dad he is!"



"Something must have kept her at the office; I'll bet she's upset that she's running late!"
or

"I hope everything's alright; it's not like him to keep me waiting!"



It should be easy to see that when you think more positively about a situation, you're more likely to act more positively with your spouse.



Even though it might seem that how you think about a situation just *happens*, you can control your thinking and *decide* to have a more positive attitude about your spouse. Learning to do this is a skill that leads to greater happiness and satisfaction in marriage.

Tip #5 + Give your spouse the benefit of the doubt.

But what if you gave your spouse the benefit of the doubt and you were wrong? When you've been let down frequently, it may be difficult for you to give your spouse the benefit of the doubt. In such cases, talking about your frustrations and deciding together how to change the situation is important. One of you will need to focus on changing some behaviors that are distressful to the other, and the other of you will need to reinforce the positives. Instead of constantly pointing out when a spouse does something *wrong*, try to notice and comment when your spouse does something *right*. For example, if he or she constantly forgets to call when behind schedule, try doing something really nice the first time he or she does remember to call. People typically respond better to praise than to criticism.

Let's face it, no one is perfect! There will always be some things about your spouse that drive you crazy, so it's very important to not let the negatives in your relationship overshadow the positives.

Take a minute to brainstorm 10 things you really like about your spouse. Write them down here, and come back to them the next time you find yourself frustrated with something about your spouse.

Tip #6 + Focus more on the positives in your spouse and in your marriage.



10 Great Things About My Spouse!

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____