

Fiona Shackleton, a Family partner at Payne Hicks Beach features in Business Insider UK first published on 30 July 2018 and reproduced with kind permission.
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The Baroness Shackleton
of Belgravia LVO
Partner, Family

10 essential questions to ask your partner that will take your relationship to the next level

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- There are some things you should know about your partner **before you decide to settle down with them.**
- There are also 10 key questions you should consider before taking your **relationship** to the next level.
- That's according to a new study from the University of Exeter.
- The team asked **divorce** lawyers, judges, and couples about what makes a good relationship.

- **Then, they came up with a list of questions that will help you work out if your relationship is heading somewhere.**
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There are a few [questions to ask on a first date](#) — and a few to avoid — to get the most out of the first time you meet someone. There are also [signs the person you're dating is right for you](#) when you first start getting to know them.

But if you want to take your relationship to the next level, new [research from the University of Exeter](#) has you covered.

The study was backed by divorce lawyer Baroness Fiona Shackleton, who has acted in high profile divorce cases, including those of Paul McCartney and Liam Gallagher. The team gathered evidence from 53 couples, 10 family lawyers and mediators, and two judges to identify the ingredients of a solid relationship.

They concluded the four main reasons for a relationship not working out long term were incompatibility, unrealistic expectations, inability to face relationship issues, and failure to nurture the relationship — or, put simply, not putting the time and effort in.

Using the results, the team came up with 10 questions everyone in a relationship should consider, which supposedly test the relationship and help the couple move forward.

Here they are:

- 1. Are my partner and I a "good fit"?**
- 2. Do we have a strong basis of friendship?**
- 3. Do we want the same things in our relationship and out of life?**
- 4. Are our expectations realistic?**
- 5. Do we generally see the best in each other?**
- 6. Do we both work at keeping our relationship vibrant?**
- 7. Do we both feel we can discuss things freely and raise issues with each other?**

8. Are we both committed to working through hard times?

9. When we face stressful circumstances would we pull together to get through it?

10. Do we each have supportive others around us?

The questions are not for the faint-hearted, and approaching them all at once might be a bit overwhelming. Anne Barlow, a professor at Exeter Law School, said it's also true that every couple is different, but "thriving relationships share some fundamental qualities."

"These 10 critical questions can help people as they decide if they are compatible with a person they are considering sharing their life with and flag the importance of dealing with issues when they arise as well as of nurturing the relationship over time," she said.

Shackleton, a partner at the firm Payne Hicks Beach, said over half of her clients consulting her about divorce say they realised very soon into their marriages — or even before — that they were fundamentally incompatible with their partner.

She added that there is little education at school about how to make one of the most important decisions in life — who you're going to settle down with (if you choose to do so at all.)

Jan Ewing, a research fellow at the University of Exeter Law School, said the best relationships in the study were built on a strong foundation of friendship. Married and cohabiting couples expressed their commitment differently, she said, but what didn't change was the need for a strong bond by talking regularly and approaching conflict in a healthy way.

"They loved their partner passionately, being aware of the other's faults but viewing their partner as an intrinsically good person," she said. "They anticipated change and pulled together during stressful seasons. Most had built networks of family and friends to support them on their journey."

Some of the characteristics of the strongest, thriving couples were being realistic, seeing the best in each other, working hard at the relationship, staying committed, adapting to change, and talking.