

Case 54C

Reasonable expectations for companionship, affection, and physical intimacy in marriage

It is reasonable to expect marriage to include **ongoing companionship, affection, emotional closeness, and a mutually cared-for physical relationship**. What is less reasonable is expecting a spouse to meet those needs on demand, at a fixed frequency, or in exactly the form one partner prefers. A healthier expectation is that both spouses take each other's needs seriously and work together to build a marriage in which both feel loved, wanted, respected, and connected.

Companionship

A reasonable expectation is that you regularly spend meaningful time together, talk about more than chores and logistics, take an interest in each other's lives and inner worlds, share experiences, offer emotional support, and make the marriage a genuine priority alongside work, friends, hobbies, phones, and extended family. This does not mean doing everything together or expecting your wife to be your only source of friendship and support.

Non-sexual intimacy

It is reasonable to hope for regular warmth and affection - for example hugs, touching, cuddling, reassurance, kind words, and emotional openness - where these are forms of closeness that both of you value. You should be able to say, "I'm feeling lonely" or "I need more closeness with you" without being mocked, dismissed, or treated as unreasonable. A significant mismatch in desired affection is worth discussing before marriage.

Physical and sexual intimacy

There is no universal "normal" frequency of sex. It is reasonable to enter marriage expecting that sexual and physical intimacy will be an important part of the relationship if that is what the two of you understand marriage to mean. It is also reasonable to expect your wife to care about your sexual wellbeing, just as you should care about hers. But neither spouse owes the other sex at a particular moment. Desire can change with stress, pregnancy, childbirth, illness, medication, conflict, exhaustion, hormones, ageing, and other circumstances.

A useful distinction

There is an important difference between "**she should always meet this need**" and "**she should care that this need matters to me.**" The second is a healthier expectation. A spouse may sometimes not want sex, but in a healthy relationship both partners should generally be willing to discuss what is happening, understand how the other is affected, preserve affection where possible, and work together when a persistent mismatch develops. Continual rejection combined with refusal to discuss the issue is different from an occasional or temporary difference in desire.

Good signs before marriage

Good signs include being able to talk about sex and affection without hostility or humiliation; either person being able to say no without fear; either person being able to say "I'm feeling neglected" without being shamed; a willingness to negotiate differences; and affection not disappearing whenever one person is annoyed.

Warning signs

Warning signs include chronic contempt or dismissiveness around either partner's needs, deliberately using affection or sex as punishment or leverage, major incompatibilities that both people are simply hoping will disappear after the wedding, an inability to discuss intimacy at all, or a belief that marriage gives either spouse an unconditional entitlement to the other's body.

Conversations to have before the wedding

Talk explicitly about how much quality time each of you imagines spending together, what makes each of you feel emotionally close, how important cuddling and everyday touch are, what each of you expects your sexual relationship to look like, how you would handle a prolonged difference in libido, what makes each of you feel desired, and what behaviours would make either of you feel neglected. You do not need identical preferences; what matters greatly is whether both of you approach differences with the attitude: "Your needs matter to me, and I want us to find something that works for both of us."

A practical benchmark

You should expect mutual goodwill, responsiveness, affection, honesty, effort, and willingness to repair problems - not guaranteed satisfaction of every need. Your wife should be able to expect exactly the same from you.

One particularly useful question for both of you to answer is: **"What would make you feel loved and connected to me in an ordinary week, and what would make you feel lonely in our marriage?"** That conversation may tell you more than trying to identify a theoretically correct amount of attention, affection, or sex.