

# envisioning the new year together

Setting goals for the next 12 months will help you draw closer as a couple

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IT WAS OUR FIRST NEW YEAR'S EVE AS A MARRIED COUPLE. As I shared my goals for the coming year (remodeling parts of our house and completing a big writing project), I could see my new husband's face fall.

When I asked Roger about it, he tried to downplay his disappointment. "I thought we would save up for a summer vacation," he finally admitted. But the look in his eyes said it all—in my excitement, I had completely left him out of my plans.

To avoid such marriage-testing discussions in the future, my husband and I make a plan to talk about how we want our year to go. I have to admit, instead of being dry and businesslike, this exercise opens the door to surprisingly intimate conversations.

We start off with one category and talk through what we'd like to accomplish in the year ahead. Notebook in hand, we write down our goals and then break them into doable chunks. Gradually we work our way through the categories. Here are a few of the categories, and the questions we ask each other:

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## House

What projects do we want to accomplish around the house in the next 12 months? We look at our resources (space, time, energy and money) and make a list of what we need for each project. We consider our skills and how we can help each other (I can paint his workshop. He can build me a chicken coop).

We add tasks we both want to get done, like replacing our water heater. Then we decide on the order of priority. This list keeps me from secretly being frustrated about what's not getting done. Plus, by putting a price tag on each project, we can create savings goals and can start saving up for what we want to accomplish.

## Finances

James W. Frick, a former vice president at the University of Notre Dame, said, "Don't tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money, and I'll tell you what they are."

Wow—that's convicting. The question is: How do we want our bank statement to look in December? Were we purposeful in how we spent our money, or will we look back and ask, "Where did it all go?" Each new year is a time not only to make plans for how we spend our money, but also to decide how much to put aside for a crisis.

## Faith

I love and trust my husband. So we ask each other where we are spiritually, and listen without judgment. I can admit (and he probably already knows) that this year has been a "valley" year for me. We will discuss how we want to grow deeper in our faith individually and as a couple. Some of the areas we cover are retreats we may want to attend, practices we want to develop and books we'd like to read as a couple or with a group.

## Health

Where are we in our physical health? We take a look at how we've been eating, exercising and resting. We evaluate whether we need to prepare meals differently or refocus some of our money for things like a gym membership. This is also a great time to make sure annual physicals and dentist appointments are scheduled. The big question we ask: How can we support each other in our goal of becoming healthier?

## Relationship

Is there an aspect of our marriage we want to work on this year? Is it time for a tune-up with a counselor or for reading a marriage book together? Perhaps it's time to plan a couple's retreat (at home or away) to get some fun back into our relationship after a long, hard year.

## Mental wellness

This is a new category for us, but it should have been included all along. We need to be checking in on each other, especially after the year most of us have had. How can we help each other improve our mental wellness in the year to come? Ideas include talking to a counselor, encouraging each other to go on walks and get out in nature, and affirming our spouse's need to spend time with family and friends.

The first time you discuss goals for the upcoming year, it may feel awkward, hard or just plain weird. But on the other side is a new level of intimacy with the one you love. And a year you can both enjoy. ●

Kathi Lipp is the author of many books including *Ready for Anything: Preparing your heart and home for any crisis big or small*. She is also a frequent guest on radio and TV, and the host of the podcast *Clutter Free Academy*.



### LISTEN NOW!

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