



*A Service of Marriage Transformation® LLC*  
*Susanne M. Alexander, Relationship & Marriage Coach*  
 25241 Chatworth Drive, Cleveland, OH 44117-1837 USA  
 Phone: (800) 501-6682; FAX: (216) 383-9953  
[susanne@marriagetransformation.com](mailto:susanne@marriagetransformation.com)  
[www.marriagetransformation.com](http://www.marriagetransformation.com); [www.bahaimarriage.net](http://www.bahaimarriage.net);  
[www.bahairelationships.com](http://www.bahairelationships.com)

*Empowering people to create happy, lasting, character-based marriages—the foundation of a prosperous, unified world*

## **Workshop: The Blessing of Strong, Happy Marriages Date?**

Sponsored by: \_\_\_\_\_

“The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá’í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #1304)

### **Presenter:**

### **Potential Schedule:**

3:00-3:30 p.m.	Welcoming; Music; Devotions
3:30-4:00 p.m.	Bahá’í Marriage and Bahá’í Marriage Laws
4:00-5:00 p.m.	Character as a Foundation of Marriage
5:00-6:00 p.m.	Pot-Luck Meal
6:00-7:00 p.m.	Building Unity Through Consultation
7:00-7:30 p.m.	The Process of Parental Consent
7:30-8:00 p.m.	Wrap-up and Unity-Building Activity

“Careful preparation for marriage is an essential first step in the preservation of Bahá’í marriage.”  
 (Introduction to *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages* compilation, item 3)

## Why Is Bahá'í Marriage Important?

- **Marriage is a foundational element for all human society**

“The Bahá'í Teachings do not only encourage marital life, considering it the natural and normal way of existence for every sane, healthy and socially-conscious and responsible person, but raise marriage to the status of a divine institution, its chief and sacred purpose being the perpetuation of the human race—which is the very flower of the entire creation—and its elevation to the true station destined for it by God.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages”, p. 446)

- **Marital and family unity among the Bahá'ís builds credibility for their message to the world; seriously courting a partner and maintaining marriages are part of an individual's and couple's service to God**

“...[I]f the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the pre-eminent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? What possible influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace?” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222)

- **Marriage is the place for sex and having children**

“The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established.” (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344)

“...[T]he primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. A couple who are physically incapable of having children may, of course, marry, since the procreation of children is not the *only* purpose of marriage. However, it would be contrary to the spirit of the Teachings for a couple to decide voluntarily never to have any children.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 380)

“...[T]he importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 120)

- **Married couples benefit from living in friendship, unity, and harmony**

“...[T]he life of a married couple should [be] a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Family Life”, p. 397)

“...[T]he union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 117)

## Friendship

There is a connection between the friendship aspect of marriage and the process of neighborhood community building:

- The Universal House of Justice is asking us to “...establish ties of friendship, on the basis of shared understanding, with those previously regarded as strangers” (UHJ, Ridván 2010, para 3) and also to “enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation” with people. (UHJ, December 28, 2010)
- Genuine friendships lead to spiritual transformation: “To the extent that the conversation continues beyond the initial encounter and veritable friendships are formed, a direct teaching effort of this kind can become a catalyst for an enduring process of spiritual transformation.” (Ridván 2010, para. 4)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How can the following qualities of excellent friendships benefit couples before and after marriage?
2. How can couples maintain their friendship after marriage?
3. How can strong, happy couple friendships and marriages benefit neighborhoods and the community?

<b>Qualities of Excellent Friendships</b>
1. Good communication; ability to share honestly about positive and difficult matters
2. Acknowledgement and affirmation of positive qualities in each other
3. Enjoyment of quiet, peaceful time together
4. Play, fun, and laughter
5. Acceptance; allowing both partners to be themselves
6. Support and appropriate sympathy, empathy, and help during difficulties
7. Enthusiasm for individual and shared achievements
8. Loving, spiritual connection
9. Encouragement
10. Loyalty
11. Trust that shared information will be kept confidential and not used hurtfully
12. Reliability; trustworthiness
13. Willingness to suspend judgment and avoid jumping to conclusions
14. Common experiences and bonding memories
15. Shared goals
16. Ability to work together on projects
17. Agreed-upon boundaries and expectations
18. Shared interests
19. Willingness to learn together
20. Ability to disagree peacefully and constructively
21. Shared values
22. Ability to reconnect easily after being apart
23. Motivational feedback or nudging that constructively influences the other to grow
24. Attitude of forgiveness and willingness to grant another chance
25. Respectfulness and equality

## **Bahá'í Marriage Laws**

“And when He [God] desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: ‘Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.’” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118)

“...[E]ntering into a marriage is a step that has tremendous implications for a whole range of people beyond the couple themselves, both in this life and in the next. The laws of the Faith are established on very sound foundations, and obedience to them is not only important for the proper development of society, but also for the attainment of true personal happiness.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an N.S.A.: August 10, 2000)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How do laws benefit us? How does the law of marriage benefit us?
2. What are some practical examples of ways that marriage contributes to well-being?
3. What are some practical examples of ways that marriage contributes to salvation (the well-being and future of your souls)?

## Aspects of Bahá'í Marriage Law to Obey

- Couple freely chooses each other as partners
- Couples practice chastity
- Parents consent to the marriage
- Engagement is 95 days maximum (Applies to some, but not all; encouraged for all others; see Assembly for specifics for your case)
- The Spiritual Assembly approves two witnesses, usually chosen by the couple
- There must be a Bahá'í ceremony that includes both parties saying the vow, "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." (Bahá'u'lláh)
- The marriage must be recognized by or conducted by civil authorities and be legal

**Discussion Question:** How does the marriage vow apply to real circumstances in marriage?

## Character as a Foundation for Marriage

"Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity...." (Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 118)

"...[T]he most hateful characteristic of man is fault-finding. One must expose the praiseworthy qualities of the souls and not their evil attributes. The friends must overlook their shortcomings and faults and speak only of their virtues and not their defects." (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, #312)

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you understand the phrase "thoroughly acquainted with the character" as balanced with the guidance in the second quotation? Is marriage preparation a time when you assess both the character strengths and weaknesses of a partner and their potential effect on the marriage, or is it better to ignore character problems?
2. What is the purpose and value of knowing one's own character and that of a potential marriage partner?
3. What activities are most valuable to learn how a partner consistently behaves with you and with others? Why would you want to know how he/she behaves with others?
4. How would you tell the difference between a character strength and a weak character quality?

**Note:** There are also character *misuses* to consider. This is when someone has a *strength* but applies it at the wrong time or place, with the wrong person, or immoderately/to excess and causes harm with it. The quality needs to be moderated or another quality applied to balance it. Example: Being overly helpful, irritating the recipient; this could be balanced with respect, where the recipient is asked first if he/she wants or would benefit from help.

## Worksheet: Assessing Your Character Qualities

(Note: The assessment process with a partner is similar.)

**Workshop Instructions:** Choose 5 character qualities and assess them in yourself. Plan to continue the assessment on your own at home.

**Purpose:** To gain greater understanding of your own strengths of character and growth areas that need improvement, so you are empowered to prepare to be an excellent partner in a relationship or marriage.

**Note:** Go through this content slowly, carefully, and with reflection to increase your knowledge of yourself.

### Full Worksheet Instructions:

- A) Place a number to the right of each character quality in the Rating column (you may wish to use a pencil), using the following assessment scale from 1 to 6:
- 1 ~ You are very weak at practicing the quality, and your words and actions are resulting in negative outcomes.
  - 2 ~ You are somewhat ineffective at practicing the quality, and your words and actions result in negative outcomes.
  - 3 ~ You are familiar with the quality, know quite well how to practice it, but you sometimes struggle to do so effectively.
  - 4 ~ You are practicing the quality effectively, but not consistently, and your words and actions usually result in positive outcomes.
  - 5 ~ You have the quality as a strength, but you frequently misuse it.
  - 6 ~ You are consistently practicing the quality effectively, and your words and actions result in positive outcomes.
- B) Put a check mark (✓) next to those qualities on the worksheet that are clearly strengths (rated 4-6).
- C) Put an ✕ next to the qualities that are too weak to practice effectively in a relationship (rated 1-3).
- D) Circle the four qualities that you now want to focus initially on developing in yourself. The qualities that you rated 1s, 2s, or 3s will be good choices for these four qualities.

Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✕	Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✕
Acceptance			Courtesy		
Assertiveness			Creativity		
Beauty			Detachment		
Caring			Discernment		
Chastity			Encouragement		
Commitment			Enthusiasm		
Compassion			Equality		
Confidence			Excellence		
Contentment			Faithfulness		
Cooperation			Flexibility		
Courage			Forgiveness		

Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✗	Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✗
Fortitude			Purity		
Friendliness			Purposefulness		
Generosity			Resilience		
Gentleness			Respect		
Helpfulness			Responsibility		
Honesty			Self-Discipline		
Humility			Service		
Idealism			Sincerity		
Integrity			Spirituality		
Joyfulness			Tactfulness		
Justice			Thankfulness		
Kindness			Thoughtfulness		
Love			Thriftiness		
Loyalty			Trustworthiness		
Mercy			Truthfulness		
Moderation			Unity		
Patience			Wisdom		
Peacefulness			Other:		
Perseverance			Other:		

**Reflection:**

1. What strong positive character qualities in me will be particular relationship strengths?

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2. What character-related concerns do I see in myself?

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3. What character strengths and resources will help me with addressing these concerns?

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4. What unresolved issues from my past are now visible?

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**Workshop Discussion: What else did you discover about the importance of character through doing this activity?**

# Building Unity Through Consultation

## The Dilemma of Conflict in Marriage

A common belief amongst professionals in the counseling and marriage education fields is that couple conflict is normal and expected...even perhaps healthy at times. Couples may be taught to “fight fairly” or to “manage conflict” so that it does not destroy the relationship. While it is normal and healthy for people to have different perspectives, and couples need to learn how to reconcile them, serious and regular conflict is an indicator of a relationship or marriage in trouble. The Bahá’í Writings say: “O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Will and Testament*, p. 13)

John M. Gottman, Ph.D., and his team at the Relationship Research Institute in Seattle, Washington, have discovered a number of couple communication behaviors that warn of a conflicted couple. The warning signs are:

1. Starting interactions negatively and harshly
2. Criticizing your partner’s character (character attack)
3. Showing contempt for your partner (sneering, mocking, being superior)
4. Reacting defensively to your partner (a form of blame)
5. Shutting your partner out and avoiding communication (stonewalling)
6. Experiencing a flood of strong physical responses to your partner’s negativity, such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, or sweating

(John M. Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*)

For a couple to reach decisions without conflict, new skills are needed.

## What Is Consultative Decision-Making?

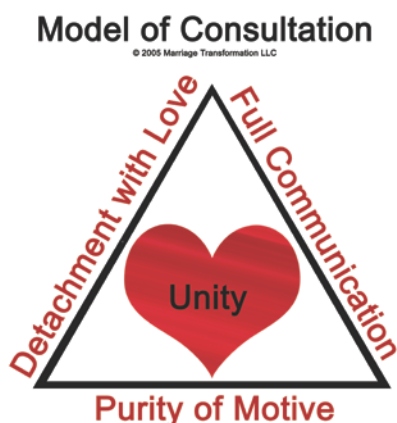
Consultative decision-making or consultation is a form of full and equal discussion between you, usually aimed at arriving at a decision about something. You focus on a common goal—what is best to do. You will use consultation to explore your thoughts, feelings, and goals. It will assist you in clarifying situations, resolving disagreements, and making decisions about actions to take. It assists you in sharing your points of view and finding solutions that work, without blaming, arguing, or telling one another what to do. Well-developed consultation skills are part of what can help couples avoid negative patterns. Couples who are skillful at consulting together are equipped to create a relationship or marriage without highly destructive conflict. Here are some perspectives on consultation from a variety of sources:

“[C]onsultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 72)

“When the intent is to enlighten, understand a truth, or gain a better perspective, and this is done with an attitude of sharing, of promoting love and harmony, it is consultation. Otherwise it is merely conversation.” (John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, p. 34)

“Consultation is a method for finding out the truth, solving problems, deciding on the best course of action, preventing difficulties, and generating new ideas and plans. It is a tool for equitably sharing power and decision-making between two or more people.” (Khalil A. Khavari and Sue Williston Khavari, *Creating a Successful Family*, p. 68)

The Bahá'í Writings also have the guidance below to share on this topic.



Guidance for Spiritual Assemblies: “The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, #43)

[In response to an inquiry about specific rules of conduct to govern the relationship between husbands and wives] “...for example, the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation

should be the keynote, that all matters must be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgment they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.” (On Behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages”, p. 456)

“Consultation has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision-making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured and/or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse are present.” (Universal House of Justice: January 24, 1993)

“The second principle is that of detachment in consultation. The members of an Assembly must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancor. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offense or belittling the views of another. Bahá'í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and, realizing this, no member should take offense at another member's statements.” (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #590)

“In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá'í weddings: “Verily they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #751, quoting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 107)



Note that couple consultation is often very informal, and there is no structure for consultation outlined in the Bahá'í Writings. You may benefit from the following outline of a more formal approach when you have something very serious to discuss, but there is no requirement to follow it.

### ***Potential Steps for Effective Consultation at the Beginning of Consultation***

1. Pray for the consultation to be effective and for the decision to be wise and unified.
2. Identify and state the problem or issue precisely, so that there is a common understanding of the focus of the consultation. Agree on the amount of time you each will spend on the consultation and whether you may need multiple conversations.
3. Identify and agree upon any principles, character qualities, or spiritual guidance that is relevant to the matter.
4. Gather and review any needed facts.

### ***Throughout the Consultation***

1. Turn to God by praying and meditating for guidance.
2. Listen carefully to one another.
3. Exchange information, perspectives, thoughts, and feelings.
4. Gather any additional facts or guidance as needed.
5. Discuss frankly and lovingly as many possible solutions, strategies, and plans as you can.
6. As appropriate, include in the discussion anyone else who is affected by the decision.

### ***Making a Decision***

1. Evaluate the proposed solutions, considering the ethical, moral, social, and practical aspects of each, such as costs, time, and energy requirements, and likely outcomes.
2. Evaluate the possible solutions, considering such aspects as finances, the energy required to carry them out, the time available, priorities, and whatever else is important to you. Eliminate unacceptable solutions.
3. Together come to a unified decision based on the principles you agreed to, the guidance that applies, and all other relevant input.
4. Write down the chosen solution, what is expected of each person involved in carrying it out, and the time when these actions will occur.
5. Pray together.

### ***Carrying Out the Plan***

1. Carry out the chosen solution(s) wholeheartedly in unity, trusting in a positive outcome and praying for assistance.
2. Reflect upon and evaluate the plan at agreed-upon stages or when circumstances change.
3. Modify the plan and change direction as needed.
4. Re-assess the outcome.

### **Activity:**

In groups of approx. 4 people, consult through one of the following scenarios, with each group taking a different scenario.

- 1) The wife's brother has asked her to lend him \$150 so he can fix his car, which he uses to get to work. The money would come out of the joint checking account, and you, as the husband and wife, need to agree about lending the money. The brother did not pay back a \$300 loan made five months before. Lending him

the money might mean delaying paying off a credit card bill. What are the issues? What are some potential guiding principles? What are the options? What do you decide?

2) You are a married couple with three children ages 6, 10, and 15. Both of you have full-time jobs. The wife serves on the Local Spiritual Assembly as treasurer. You host a devotional meeting one night a week and a study circle another night of the week. The husband is secretary for a local civic organization that meets twice a month. You are asked if you would be able/willing to plan and host children's classes in your home. What are the issues? What are some potential guiding principles? What are the options? What do you decide?

3) You are a married couple with two children ages 15 and 17. The 17-year-old has taken driver's training and has his driver's license. Your 15-year old daughter is looking forward to doing the same. You give your son permission to drive three friends to a city an hour away for the evening in your car. Two hours later, you receive a call from the police that your son was pulled over for speeding—20 miles over the speed limit. The police want to know whether they should impound the car and whether you want him jailed or returned home. You also have to decide on the consequences you will impose. What are the issues? What are some potential guiding principles? What are the options? What do you decide?

4) You are married and strict vegetarians. The husband's parents are coming to stay with you for a few days, are not vegetarians, and do not agree with this lifestyle choice at all. Consult about how you will manage this issue during the visit in a way that will maintain family unity and harmony—while also maintaining your health or desired lifestyle.

5) You are married, and the husband is working from an office at home. The wife gets home from work in the late afternoon, and the husband calls down from the office to say hello. He generally comes downstairs about a half hour later. She would like her husband to greet her in person at the door when she arrives, instead. Consult about the feelings and needs each person has and come to an agreement about how to manage the connection/greeting at that point in the day.

6) You are a married couple, and you have a piece of property you need to sell. Close friends of yours are renting a home from you on the property and may not be able to afford to move elsewhere. You pray and have a few consultations over a period of weeks. After listening carefully to one another, you discover that there are a number of factors to consider:

- You need the money from the property sale for a variety of other essentials in your lives
- You do not want to have to do maintenance on the property any longer
- You may owe part of the sale proceeds to the friends, because there was an informal agreement that their rent payments were going toward purchasing the property
- You both feel frustration and concern because you need the money, but you are also loyal to your friends

What are the issues? What are some potential guiding principles? What are the options? What do you decide?

## Parental Consent

There are many quotations that relate to the subject of parental consent. Below is a small selection to illustrate key principles. If you are going through consent either as a couple or as parents, it would be wise to seek out and study the broader range of guidance. Likewise, the Universal House of Justice often updates its guidance on this topic. Families facing unusual circumstances, such as adoption, difficulty in finding a parent, the status of the parent's rights to give consent (such as in the case of child abuse), should all be referred to the local Spiritual Assembly, which may need to seek guidance from other institutions.

### Purpose of Consent

“...[M]arriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them.” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 42)

“Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living [birth/natural] parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Notes, p. 207)

**Discussion Question:** What are some of the purposes of parental consent?

### Responsibilities of Parents

“Bahá'í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage.” (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, #1231)

“There is nothing in the Writings, however, which requires a couple to get married once they have consent from all parents; they are quite free to change their minds. Likewise, if a parent changes his or her mind, he or she can withdraw his or her permission at any time before the marriage takes place, in which case the couple cannot get married.” (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 40)

“You will note that the aspect of protecting the child from making the wrong decision is not mentioned in any...quotations as a reason for the law, although it may well play a part in the parents' decision as they have the obligation to consider the welfare and happiness of their children at all times. However limited our understanding of this and other laws given us by Bahá'u'lláh, we are assured that the divine blessings await those who place their reliance in Him and obey His commandments.” (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.7)

### Discussion Questions:

1. What length of time could it take for consent to occur?
2. In what ways is consent more like a process than an event?
3. What could cause a couple to change their minds about marrying or parents to withdraw consent?
4. Are parents responsible for the outcome of the marriage? How could fear of this responsibility and possible marital outcomes interfere with effectively considering consent?

## Reasons for Refusing Consent

“...[T]he principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá’í from regarding race itself as a bar to union... For both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá’í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race....” (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 39)

“The validity of a Bahá’í marriage is dependent upon the free and full consent of all four parents. The freedom of the parents in the exercise of this right is unrestricted and unconditioned. They may refuse their consent on any ground, and they are responsible for their decision to God alone.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 444)

“It is perfectly true that Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that the consent of all living parents is required for marriage places a grave responsibility on each parent. When the parents are Bahá’ís they should, of course, act objectively in withholding or granting their approval. They cannot evade this responsibility by merely acquiescing in their child’s wish, nor should they be swayed by prejudice; but, whether they be Bahá’í or non-Bahá’í, the parents’ decision is binding, whatever the reason that may have motivated it. Children must recognize and understand that this act of consenting is the duty of a parent. They must have respect in their hearts for those who have given them life, and whose good pleasure they must at all times strive to win.” (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, #1237)

### Discussion Questions:

1. What could be reasons that parents might refuse consent?
2. Do the parents have to give their reasons to the couple?
3. What could be the outcome of parents refusing to share their reasons?

### Involving the Spiritual Assembly

“Bahá’ís who cannot marry because of lack of consent of one or more parents could consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly, to see whether it may suggest a way to change the attitude of any of the parents involved. The believers, when faced with such problems, should put their trust in Bahá’u’lláh, devote more time to the service, the teaching and the promotion of His Faith, be absolutely faithful to His injunctions on the observance of an unsullied, chaste life, and rely upon Him to open the way and remove the obstacle, or make known His will.” (Universal House of Justice: *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 16.15)

“The Universal House of Justice will offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your parents’ hearts may be inspired and enlightened to see and consider the best interests of their daughter. It may be helpful in this regard to ask the assistance of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the area where your parents live, or of some wise and mature Bahá’ís to meet with your parents and gradually familiarize them with the tenets of the [Bahá’í] Faith and remove the misconceptions they have... You are strongly advised by the House of Justice to continue your loving attitude towards your parents and be assured that your dutiful obedience to your parents will attract Bahá’u’lláh’s blessings and will ensure your future happiness.” (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 39)

**Note:** There are grave spiritual consequences if a Bahá’í chooses to disobey Bahá’í law and proceed with marriage without consent. If a Bahá’í marriage does not happen, and only a civil one or one of another faith occurs, the Bahá’í community and institutions do not regard the couple as married. Breaking the marriage law can also result in the sanction of a Bahá’í losing his or her administrative rights, which can exclude the person from such activities as voting in elections, serving on administrative bodies, attending the 19-Day Feast, and giving to the Bahá’í Fund. The individual(s) would then have to consult with the Spiritual Assemblies at the local and national level about remedying this spiritually painful situation. You may be able

to feel almost instant willingness to accept and obey this law. Alternatively, it may take prayer, meditation, consultation, and the passage of time before you reach acceptance and a full willingness to observe the laws.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the roles of the Spiritual Assembly related to consent?
2. What would be the best ways for a couple who has been refused consent to behave in response?

## Unity Building Activity – Facilitator’s Choice

### Resources for Couples Having Marriage Difficulties

Marriage education helps couples build capacity and strengths and equips people to be successful in their roles as marriage partners. The following websites are potential resources for you:

- [www.marriagetransformation.com](http://www.marriagetransformation.com)
- [www.bahaimarriage.net](http://www.bahaimarriage.net)
- [www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com)
- [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)

### Marriage Counseling

“Consultation is...available for the individual in solving his own problems; he may consult with his Assembly, with his family and with his friends.” (“Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989; complete letter available at [www.bahaimarriage.net/resources.net](http://www.bahaimarriage.net/resources.net))

“Neither you nor your husband should hesitate to continue consulting professional marriage counselors, individually and together if possible, and also to take advantage of the supportive counseling which can come from wise and mature friends. Non-Bahá’í counseling can be useful but it is usually necessary to temper it with Bahá’í insight.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 455)