

Once Evelyn realized what she was doing, and how it was affecting Noel and their marriage, she was able to change. She brought the baby to her parents' home less often, so that they saw their granddaughter mostly on Noel's home turf. When her mother expressed concern that the baby wasn't getting enough to eat, Evelyn piped up that Noel had just taken her to the pediatrician, who declared her perfectly plump and healthy. When her father suggested that the baby needed a heavier snowsuit, Evelyn told him that Noel knew better than anyone what was best for their daughter. At first, Evelyn's parents were miffed by her new attitude. But as time went on, they came to accept the change. And Noel and Evelyn found that their marriage flourished. They finally developed a sense that they were a team. They had mastered the task of building "we-ness."

EXERCISE 1: IN-LAW PROBLEMS

If you are having ongoing problems with a family member, fill out this brief questionnaire. It will focus you on these relationships so that you can determine whether your sense of "we-ness" as a couple needs to be strengthened when it comes to a particular relative. You should both jot down your answers to this form on separate paper.

1. Think of your relationship with various members of your spouse's family. If you feel that your partner isn't necessarily on your side in any of these relationships or that there are ongoing issues with a particular family member, check off the appropriate box.

- Spouse's mother
- Spouse's stepmother
- Spouse's father
- Spouse's stepfather
- Spouse's brother(s) _____
- Spouse's sister(s) _____
- Other family member _____

Describe the successes so far:

Describe the conflicts that remain:

2. Think about your spouse's relationship with your kin. If you feel that your spouse isn't necessarily on your side in any of these relationships or that there are ongoing issues with a particular family member, check off the appropriate box.

- Mother
- Stepmother
- Father
- Stepfather
- Brother(s) _____
- Sister(s) _____
- Other family member _____

Describe the successes so far:

Describe the conflicts that remain:

Now get together with your spouse and read over each other's responses. Discuss what can be done to increase the amount of support and solidarity you are getting from each other. Try not to be defensive if your spouse perceives a problem and you don't. Remember that much about relationships has to do with perception. So, for example, if your wife believes that you side with your own mother against her, that's something you need to work on in your marriage, even if you don't agree with her perception of the situation.

Money, Money, Money

The task: Balancing the freedom and empowerment money represents with the security and trust it also symbolizes.

Whether their bank account is teeming or they're just scrimping by, many couples confront significant conflicts over finances. Often such disputes are evidence of a perpetual issue, since money is symbolic of many emotional needs—such as safety and power—and goes to the core of our individual value systems. But when a simpler, solvable financial problem arises, the key to resolving it is to first understand a marriage's task in this area. While money buys pleasure, it also buys security. Balancing these two economic realities can be work for any couple, since our feelings about money and value are so personal and often idiosyncratic.

I find that solvable financial differences are usually the province of newlyweds. That's because as a marriage goes on, these issues either become resolved successfully or develop into perpetual problems about money's symbolic meanings. However, long-term couples may also find themselves facing a solvable money issue as their circumstances change. Differences of opinion over job changes, financing the children's education, planning for retirement, and caring for elderly parents are common sources of friction in midlife.

The solution: Some clearheaded budgeting is called for. Below are some simple steps you can take to get a handle on how much you'd like to spend—and on what. Keep in mind, though,