

10 Critical Areas of Work, Focus, and Commitment For a Mixed-Faith Marriage

1. Mindset:

Whether it is myself or my spouse that changed religious belief, I will not dwell in a victim mentality about this change and will instead focus on a co-creating mentality.

I recognize that it is a universal basic human right to both have and maintain a religious belief, and to change one's religious belief at any time. I understand that change will inevitably lead to disappointment about my expectations and my vision of our life together regardless of whether I am the believer or non-believer in my marriage, the disappointment can go both ways. However, I recognize that disappointment is a normal part of ALL relationships. I will not dwell long-term in that disappointment and live in a victim mentality where I am powerless to my life circumstances. Instead, I will grieve the changes and then get to work focusing on being an active participant in co-creating something workable for both of us as we each grow and change in different ways throughout our relationship as our lives unfold.

If either I or my spouse are not able to co-create something workable together, and one or both of us remains in a victim mentality, we commit to getting some help to figure out why we are stuck so that we can't move into a co-creating mentality together. Healthy marriages are about actively co-creating a life together which we will not be able to do from a place of victimhood, so it is essential to get out of a victim mentality which only keeps us perpetually stuck.

2. Boundaries:

I commit to cleaning up my side of the street only, not my spouse's side of the street.

My side of the street, when it comes to my spiritual life, is getting to know my own version of faith and spirituality (whatever that may be), my own values, how I want to live my life from my own values and beliefs, and how I want to communicate about them in relationship with others. It is a violation of boundaries for me to try to influence, correct, dictate, or push my spouse to have the same perspectives and values as me or behave like me in their spiritual or non-spiritual life. Their beliefs are outside of my boundaries and not for me to control or intrude upon. Their thoughts, beliefs, and spirituality belong to them, not me. I can trust that as an adult, they can ask for my thoughts and input if they want it, but otherwise they are capable of managing their own spiritual life.

I will not violate boundaries by telling them what they should think, feel, believe, or be motivated by. I commit to focusing on developing my own sense of self, my own spiritual beliefs, values, and motivations instead of focusing my energy on how I wish or hope my spouse would lead their life. There will always be more than enough work on my own side of the street to occupy my energy, and by putting my focus on my own work, my relationship will always benefit more than if I am focused on my spouse's side of the street.

3. Agreements and Non-Negotiables:

I recognize that any effectively functioning partnership requires clear agreements and rules.

I understand that if the rules and agreements that our marriage were based upon do not reflect our current situation, that we may need to revise them and create a new set of agreements and new rules. These agreements should include why we want to be together now, what our new shared values and purpose are, how we will treat each other's beliefs and perspectives, and how we will make decisions about our shared life.

I recognize that if I have non-negotiables that I want to be part of our new agreements, I need to clearly articulate them. It is my responsibility to know and be clear on what my own boundaries and non-negotiables are as we set up agreements (see #2 about working on your own side of the street). I commit to being honest with myself about whether being in a mixed-faith marriage is a non-negotiable or not. If it is not a dealbreaker, then I will get out of victim mentality (see #1 about mindset) and work on co-creating some new agreements and rules for our partnership that will guide how we manage our differences and how we move forward in our relationship.

4. Respect:

I commit to eliminating all forms of contempt or looking down upon my spouse for their beliefs or perspectives.

I will find ways to respect them for who they are as a human being and as someone I love even if I don't agree with them. I can disagree without placing myself above them. I will see them as an equal to me with different life experiences that have shaped the way they think, act, and feel, but which do not make them less than me in any way. I too, have been shaped by many factors, so we are always equals, no better-than or less-than each other. I will eliminate sarcasm, belittling language, disrespectful language, and criticism toward my spouse's belief system or value system because doing that stems from a feeling of superiority and looking down on my spouse which I will not do.

I commit to respect them and their beliefs with dignity and diplomacy just as I would want them to respect mine in the same way. I commit to not reducing the deep complexity and layers of who my spouse is to only their beliefs, views, or religious/non-religious affiliation. I commit to a lifetime of what Terry Real calls “full respect living,” meaning I will **NEVER** drop below the lines of respect in word or deed regarding my spouse and their beliefs, or anything else for that matter.

5. Sharing:

If I want to share something that matters to me regarding church/belief/ perspectives, I commit to share with the purpose of being seen and known regarding things that are important to me so that my spouse can get to know me better, instead of sharing for their validation or to convince or change them.

I recognize that effective and productive human communication in an intimate partnership requires thoughtful constraint, and consideration in what, when, and how I share. I commit to practicing the art of sharing in healthy and mature ways by always asking for consent to share, and by being very contained and intentional with how I share. I recognize that authenticity does not mean I get to share whatever I want, however I want, and whenever I want to share. Sharing in an uncontained and unrestrained way only invites ineffective and unproductive communication patterns. I commit to practicing the art of effective, diplomatic sharing and communication throughout the life of our relationship because that will ultimately lead to increased capacity for connection even in our differences.

Sharing to more deeply reveal who I am without needing or expecting the validation of my spouse's agreement will also increase our capacity to understand each other more deeply. I recognize that the most effective form of sharing and revealing about myself comes from sharing my own vulnerable experiences and feelings, and it comes less from sharing facts, information, podcasts, articles, or other people's experiences.

6. Compromise/Negotiation and Win-Win Solutions:

I will compromise, negotiate, and always work toward always finding win-win solutions in my marriage.

I recognize that the majority of the problems in our marriage, including faith differences, will not have completely satisfying solutions because we are very different people at our core in ways that won't ever change despite our best efforts. Because of this, I will focus on managing our differences instead of trying to eliminate them. I commit to practicing the art of experimenting, thinking outside of the box, and trying to negotiate and compromise until we reach a win-win solution. I commit to ensuring that there is never a winner/loser as we navigate our faith differences and that we will find a way for us each

to maintain the core essence of who we are while still being a team to help us both get some of the things we want and need.

I will view all compromises and efforts to manage our differences as short-term experiments that can always be adjusted and changed. I don't have to figure out our whole life and make permanent compromises! Our shared life is a creative work in progress. I also commit to the practice of learning to maturely tolerate the discomfort of not getting everything that I want, which is an important part of all healthy relationships. I commit to standing up for myself as an equal in the partnership so that I can get some of what really matters to me and advocate for my own needs, but I recognize that I will not get all of what I want in my relationship and that is ok and normal in any marriage whether mixed-faith or not. It is my work to handle that with acceptance and maturity and I commit to practicing this art for the life of our relationship.

7. Flexibility and Adaptability:

I recognize that part of living in a relational way with another dynamic human being means always needing to adapt, pivot and accept the fact that doing things my ideal way all of the time is not reality.

I recognize that flexibility is a sign of wellness and emotional health, and rigidity is a sign of mental or emotional unhealth both within an individual and within a relationship. This means that if I am struggling to be flexible and adaptable enough in our mixed-faith situation to let go of my ideal way of doing things and find workable solutions that will make room for both of us in the relationship, I commit to getting to the bottom of what might be contributing to this. It may be anxiety, ADHD, OCD, childhood trauma, religious trauma, scrupulosity, etc. that is contributing to this rigidity. I commit to doing my own work to understand and address any mental health conditions or other preconditions that may be impacting my capacity for flexibility and adaptability in my mixed-faith relationship.

I realize that for a mixed-faith marriage to thrive, both of us need to be able to maintain our core essence while still being able to let go of control and adapt and pivot and experiment enough to co-create something workable together. I recognize that changing circumstances is normal in all relationships, and part of relationship work is having an adaptable relationship that can tolerate those changes. I understand that control is always antithetical to thriving relationships, and part of my own work on becoming more flexible and adaptable will be around letting go of control and being able to better tolerate uncertainty and discomfort. I commit to understanding my own areas of inflexibility so that I can increase my capacity to move out of rigidity and into more flexibility and adaptability. This will help me to productively handle changing circumstances and stressors in my relationship making it much more resilient.

8. Mixed-Faith Parenting As A Gift:

I recognize that parenting is about nurturing and guiding my children, and that my spouse and I having different belief systems is not a detriment to that, but can actually help us to do that even more effectively.

I commit to bringing the strengths of both of our perspectives and beliefs to show our children different value systems, different ways of solving problems, different ways of handling difficulties, different ways of making choices, and different ways of moving through the world so that they will be more equipped with a variety of ways to navigate the complexity of their own lives. I commit focusing on and building on what we have in common as far as parenting values instead of focusing on where we are different.

I commit to co-creating our family unit by finding our common ground and bringing our different strengths and values into the relationship instead of dividing our family based on beliefs. I understand that unity is not about being the same but about being in this together. I will model a relationship where both of us have the freedom to be ourselves and still be connected as a team doing life together. I recognize that modeling healthy compromise and collaboration around our biggest differences is a huge gift to give our children that will be incredibly useful in both their personal and professional lives.

9. Rituals:

I recognize that shared rituals are a part of thriving relationship and family units. I understand that while religious traditions have a lot of rituals within them from attending church weekly together to family prayer, couple and family rituals can come in many different forms. It is not the content of the ritual that makes a couple or family thrive, but the fact that there are rituals in place that help bring a unit or family together at regular intervals amidst busy lives.

I recognize that in order to co-create a mixed-faith marriage, we will need to find or create our new family rituals. These rituals may incorporate things from each of our belief systems, or we can create new rituals all together that aren't related to either of our beliefs but are related to our shared family values, shared hobbies, interests, passions, goals, fun, holidays, sports, etc. I commit to developing our own couple and family rituals that are more reflective of our current mixed-faith situation and that aren't impacted by the fact that we have different beliefs. This is part of the work of co-creating our lives together in a meaningful way. I commit to working on my own flexibility and adaptability as we work to find new rituals, revamp current rituals and explore new ways to ritualize our shared life together.

10. Interdependence, Not Codependence:

I recognize that it is not my spouse's job to make me feel good by validating my perspective, agreeing with me, liking how I think about things, or liking the way that I do things.

Healthy relationships absolutely do require a lot of healthy communication about the ways that we impact and interact with each other, and they also require considerate, respectful and loving interactions. However, it is ALWAYS MY JOB 100% OF THE TIME to practice over and over being ok and feeling whole whether or not my partner validates my thinking, perspectives, and beliefs. It is my own work to not lose my own sense of inner wholeness or abundance in the face of our different ways of seeing things.

I recognize that healthy and thriving relationships occur when two people who have their own full, inner sense of abundance and wholeness join together through interdependence. I understand that oppositely, symptomatic and problematic relationships occur when someone who lacks inner wholeness on their own is trying to get that through their spouse agreeing with them and validating their way of doing things. I commit to working on my own wholeness and my own self-validation so that I don't need to rely on my spouse to create my inner abundance for me. I commit to working on this practice throughout my life in order to increase my capacity for healthy and thriving relationships. The more that I work on this, the more resilient I will be to changes and stresses within the relationship, and the more resilient our relationship will be.

All of these areas of work, focus, and commitment encompass the art, skill and work of being in a mixed-faith marriage with two unique individuals who can still create a meaningful, shared life together.