



Consultation for couples and families

Angela Fransson's Insights from the Wilmette Institute Course:
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What is Consultation?

- *Definition: 1.) the act of consulting; conference. 2.) a meeting for deliberation, discussion, or decision. (dictionary.com)*

Quotations from the Bahá'í writings:

- *“ The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding,” (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 168)*

What is Consultation?

- *“Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is the shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”* (Bahá’u’lláh, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol 1, #168)

Why consult?

- *“Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the face of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man’s reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit. The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members should consult.”*
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol 1, #180)

Arriving at Truth

- *“They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinions, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s view will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.” (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Administration, p.22)*

How to consult?

- *“Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision.”* (The Universal House of Justice, in *Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986* 95: 37.9)
- *“ Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husband, nor husbands their wives....”* (On Behalf of The Universal House of Justice, *Compilations of Compilations, Vol 2, “ Women,”* p. 383)

How to Consult?

- *“Concerning the open expression of feelings during consultation, clearly the expression of feelings and the emotional tone of the interaction make an important contribution to the consultative process... It is important to note that truth emerges after the ‘clash’ of carefully articulated views, not from the clash of feelings. A clash of feelings is likely to obscure the truth, while a difference of opinion facilitates the discovery of truth.” (Bahá’í World Center Research Department memorandum to The Universal House of Justice, “Issues Concerning Community Functioning,” February 1993, section 2).*

How to communicate with your spouse



Developing Excellent Communication

1.) Demonstrate **Responsibility** with Talking.

- **Timeliness-** Requires careful thought about what you are going to say and when. Avoid (or halt) important or sensitive communications and actions if you are:
 - **H: Hungry**
 - **A: Angry**
 - **L: Lonely**
 - **T: Tired**

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Developing Excellent Communication

- **Truthfulness**- communicating accurately to convey one's best understanding of facts and feelings. We actively seek to find the truth inside ourselves and share it. When we are clear what is true about ourselves and our marriage, we can be open and sharing with others. We admit when we make a mistake, and we do not lie about it, even to defend ourselves. Truthfulness protects us from the damage and destruction that exaggeration, deceit, and lies cause.

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Developing Excellent Communication

- **Tactfulness**- is choosing whether and when to act or speak and when speaking, using gentle and kind words with the intention of not offending others or hurting their feelings. With tactfulness as part of our marriage, we carefully assess what we are about to say, and we determine whether our words are timely, constructive, and wise. We stay aware of the effect of our words, gestures, body language, and tone of voice on one another. Sometimes we wait for our emotions to be calm before responding respectfully to the thoughts, opinions, or feelings of the other. Other times, we choose to delay or not speak at all out of loving sensitivity for the other.

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Developing Excellent Communication

2.) Show **Respect** Through Listening

- Accompanied Listening- A listener is an active and equal participant through:
 - Asking respectful questions to discern and understand the talker's words, needs, feelings, fears and concerns. Use words like what, when and how rather than why which puts each on the defensive.
 - Applying self-discipline by patiently listening and not interrupting.
 - Being caring and compassionate as appropriate
 - Setting aside biases, prejudices, and judgments; avoiding any words, tone of voice, or action that communicates control, domination, or an adversarial position.

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Developing Excellent Communication

- **Building Understanding**

- Truly listening to one another creates a powerful, intimate bond between you. It is one of the keys to developing friendship, intimacy, and unity between people. Life can become hectic, and when you are going multiple directions, it may often feel as if you communicate briefly, and only what is necessary, to keep moving forward.
- Effective communication requires that you practice patience and slow down, fully express yourselves, and courteously hear one another's thoughts and feelings. It means truly listening with respect to the words one another says and, whenever possible, understanding the emotions and needs behind the words.

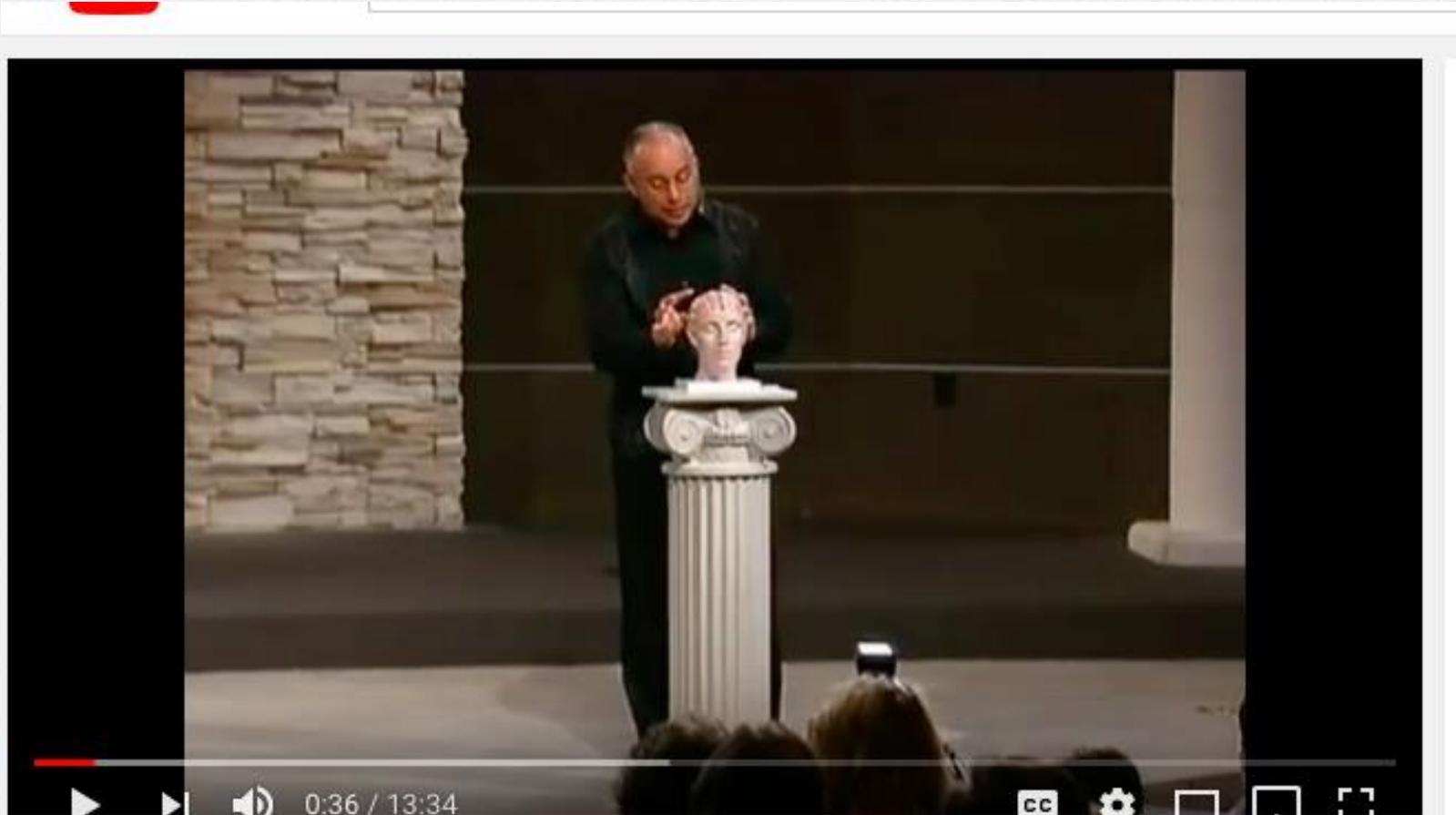
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Developing Excellent Communication

- **Respect-**

- “Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being ‘perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect’: and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy... On no subject are the Bahá’í teachings more empathetic than on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding, while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.” (From a Letter written on behalf of The Guardian to an individual believer, May 12, 1925: *Living the Life*, pp. 2-3; *Lights of Guidance*, p. 92)

Respecting Differences



Developing Excellent Communication

- **Bring Sincerity in Their Acknowledging**
 - Identifying a character quality someone has used
 - Carefully noting the circumstances that were occurring at the time
 - Sincerely sharing with the person what was observed and how much it was appreciated.
 - Including as appropriate the effect the other person's words and actions had.
 - Character Quality language:
 - “ Thank you for being (Helpful, Flexible, Truthful...) when you... ”
 - “ I appreciated your (Courage, Respect, Patience....) when you....”
 - “ I love how (Accepting, Enthusiastic, Encouraging...) you are!!!”

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Addressing Challenges

Disunity= Darkness

Behaviors that contribute to disunity

- 1.) Criticism
- 2.) Defensiveness
- 3.) Contemptuous
- 4.) Stonewalling

Addressing Challenges



Feel the Feeling, but do the right thing

YouTube



Consulting in Unity

- **Suggested Couple Consultation Guidelines**
- **At the Beginning**
 - 1.) Prepare in Advance
 - 2.) Assess Timeliness and Privacy
 - 3.) Focus
 - 4.) Explore Openly
 - 5.) Build Love and Unity

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Consulting in Unity

- **Throughout the Process**

- 1.) Include Others
- 2.) Share and Listen
- 3.) Practice Equality, Respect and Fairness
- 4.) Search for a Diversity of Solutions
- 5.) Monitor the Quality
- 6.) Release After Sharing- Release your contributions into an imaginary central area where neither of you “owns” them. They belong to both of you and you can change them as needed. As you gain new perspectives, you create mutual solutions.

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Consulting in Unity

- **Making a Decision**

- 1.) Make a Unified Decision- Settle matters in harmony and love, and conclude with a unified decision.
- 2.) Defer as Needed- At times you may struggle to find an agreed solution, or alternatively one of you may have more expertise or may not have a strong opinion about an issue. One of you may choose to defer to the other's opinion which is still a unified decision.
- 3.) See additional Help

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Consulting in Unity

- **Carrying out the Decision**
- 1.) Share Responsibility: Commit to carrying out the decision wholeheartedly in unity together.
- 2.) Set up Support Systems- calendar, cellphone reminders, notes on a bedroom mirror.
- 3.) Pause for Reflections and Assessment

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Method used for consulting

- Say prayers, and get 3 X 5 index cards
 - Principles
 - Concerns
 - Feelings
 - Facts
 - Possible Solutions

Method Used for consulting

- **Principles-** Respecting difference of Faith and beliefs in the Halloween Holiday. Importance of keeping family Unity.
- **Concern-** Don't want to offend our in-laws while they visit. Also want to allow children to have fun as they enjoy dressing up for Halloween.
- **Fact-** Halloween for my husband and in-laws is considered a pagan holiday and they feel we shouldn't allow our children to follow Halloween traditions.
- **Feelings-** Frustrated that we haven't been able to see In-laws even though we have invited them on 5 different occasions to meet us for a vacation and they always are busy. This is the only time they can come.
- **Possible solutions-** We're looking at it as a teachable moment for our children. We will have a discussion with our children before the in-laws arrive and let our children know how grandma and grandpa feel and think about Halloween. We will show our respect and not talk about what were doing for Halloween including our costume, etc. around them.
- **Actions-** We usually put out decorations for Halloween. We will not put out decorations , including carving pumpkins, etc.

Family Consultation

- **How can we start consultation with a young family?**
 - Parents need to be particularly sensitive to their children when beginning the process of consultation. It is important to remember it is a process and not merely a goal-oriented exercise. The over-all aim is to build family unity, which is much more important than any short-term objective.

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Family Consultation

- **How can we start consultation with a young family?**
 - You may wish to begin by doing some “practice” consultation sessions in which different aspects of consultation can be learned. For example, one skill needed in consultation is an appreciation that people have different preferences and opinions- one person likes the color green, another hates it. There is no right or wrong in this, as it is merely a preference. An exercise to understand this principle might be to get each family member to say what their favorite food is, or color, or pastime. This is not a competition!!! Some simple rules could be made. For example, no one can say “ugh” to another person’s stated preference. You can expect very small children to choose the same color or food as a bigger brother or sister. Another rule might be that you can’t say “ That was MY idea”. This also helps older children understand the concept of being detached from one’s opinions once they are expressed. (Family Consultation As Part of the Family’s DNA, A Blog Article by Wendi Momen)

Family Consultation

- **What are some benefits of family consultation?**
 - Consultation helps create unity. As each person shares his views he is made to feel strong bonds as part of a family that values and loves him.
 - Difficult problems are solved within the warmth of a loving family, the people who are closest to you.
 - Children develop self-respect and begin to know that their point of view counts. This in turn gives them confidence that can be used in other situations. (Family Consultation As Part of the Family's DNA, *A Blog Article by Wendi Momen*)

Family Consultation

- **What are some benefits of family consultation?**
 - When family consultation becomes habitual, it is more likely that children when adolescents and adults will turn to consultation in time of need. People who are used to solving problems by talking about them are less likely to be aggressive or become angry when they don't get their way; they are more likely to resolve difficulties rationally rather than through violence or force. (Family Consultation As Part of the Family's DNA, A Blog Article by Wendi Momen)

Family Consultation

- **What are some benefits of family consultation?**
 - When troubles do occur in a young person's life, they can be secure in the knowledge that the family will listen and try to understand and help. They know there is a forum for airing problems in a calm and reasoned way. If a problem arises, a young person will know that he or she can bring it to the family without a parent getting very angry or upset.
 - Many problems can be resolved before they grow too large. (Family Consultation As Part of the Family's DNA, *A Blog Article by Wendi Momen*)

Family Consultation

- **What do we consult about?**

- Family holidays
- The distribution of family jobs
- Bedtimes
- Deciding which TV programmes or films a child may watch
- How much time to spend on the computer or computer games
- Difficulties at school
- Family Budget on entertainment
- Family New Years Resolutions

(Family Consultation As Part of the Family's DNA, A *Blog Article* by Wendi Momen)

Setting guidelines and goals

- Examples of Communication Guidelines
 - We will let each other finish talking without interrupting
 - We will listen to, respect and accept each other feelings
 - We will respond to others ideas in a moderate, peaceful way.
 - We will express our understanding of the other persons position and perspective.

(Susanne M. Alexander, www.marriagetransformation.com)

Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- Advice given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to a believer about marriage and family life
 - They must not become ill-disposed toward each other on account of the ephemeral incidents and accidents of this changeful life. Their hearts must be spacious, as spacious as the universe of God. In case any difference of opinion should arise between them, they must do their utmost to settle it by themselves, and not let its knowledge go out of the family; for people are apt to change a speck into a mountain. Again, in case a circumstance causes a real offense between the two, they must not keep it in their hearts, but rather explain its nature to each other and try to remove it as soon as possible. They must prefer fellowship and amity to jealousy and hypocrisy, and be like two pure mirrors reflecting the light of the stars of love and beauty to each other.

(<http://centerofcovenanttalks.blogspot.com/2013/06/advice-given-by-abdul-baha-to-believer.html>)

Comments/Questions?