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## To marry or not: What's emotional intelligence got to do with it? <sup>[1]</sup>

Hi Alice,

Can you help me get a picture of how good/bad life will be if I get married to a low EQ and high IQ guy? And this guy is like ten years older than me. I'm one of those outgoing, fun-loving, cheerful, and filled with life kind of people. It's time for me to take up a decision; can you give me some advice?

### Answer

Dear Reader,

EQ, IQ, eek-Q! Thinking about marriage can get your mind racing with questions about compatibility, including emotional styles. EQ — or emotional intelligence (EI) — is the idea that a person's ability to manage emotions and understand others' feelings can be measured, just like intelligence is measured with an IQ score. EQ is basically an emotional IQ, although the best way to go about measuring it hasn't been quite worked out yet. While it might be enticing to boil everything down to a number, here's a word of warning: in reality, people are much more complicated than a score on a test — be it one of intellectual or emotional intelligence. While thinking about your partner's EQ and/or IQ might give you a sense of what your future might look like, EQ and IQ are just two pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of love.

High EQ traits are certainly valued; just look at the whole slew of idioms that try to get at EQ — being a “people person,” being able to “walk in someone else's shoes,” or “keeping your cool.” However, there aren't a lot of studies showing whether EQ makes better or worse marriages. One study has suggested that relationships with one low EQ partner can lead to unhappiness for the other partner. But, you might want to take it with a grain of salt. EQ is challenging to define and fluid: Is there really ever a single “right” way to handle emotional turbulence? Might the “right” answer change depending on culture or context? What *is* more established by researchers, though, is that having a positive affect toward a partner — having a sense of humor with each other and showing affection and interest — can be one of the key ingredients for happily-ever-

after.

You also mention your partner has a high IQ. Some studies have found that couples in which both people have a high IQ do tend to be more satisfied than other couples, especially in the first few years. While there's not as much known about whether this trend is true for couples in which only one partner has a high IQ, it's good to keep in mind that intelligence isn't the end-all be-all of a relationship. [I'm intimidated by my incredibly intelligent partner](#) [2] is one place to read about some ways to find love and happiness with a brainiac beau.

In any case, it's not uncommon to hear a nagging little internal voice when you're considering settling down. However, having lots of doubts about compatibility — getting “cold feet” — can sometimes be a red flag. Pre-marital doubts, especially in women, have been associated with higher divorce rates. This is usually because problems that exist before marriage — the ones that cause people to have doubts in the first place — often recur again and again for couples throughout marriage. Catching these issues early and seeking help from a couple's counselor or working out solutions together is recommended. Here are a few questions to ask yourself to get you started as you think about the future:

- **What has led you to believe your partner has a low EQ?** While it's possible that your partner does fall lower on the EQ spectrum, there could be other reasons that he *seems* to be low EQ to you. Was he raised in a culture or family environment that had different norms that might lead him to express emotions differently? Might you simply have different expectations of what it means to be in a relationship or how you think you should express love?
- **What are some things you *do* have in common?** Sharing interests, hobbies, friends, values, morals, or a favorite ice cream flavor can give you some common ground and may help you build a solid relationship regardless of differences in EQ or IQ.
- **Does the age difference bother you?** You mention that your partner is ten years older than you. Studies have found that age differences greater than two years can sometimes make relationships a little trickier, especially if a woman is older than her partner. Lots of happy couples do successfully straddle [age gaps](#) [3], but asking yourself how you personally feel about the age difference might help you decide about the future.
- **How do you communicate when times get tough?** Do you like to talk face-to-face when you're upset, or do you need time to cool off? Are you or your partner interested in having someone like a counselor guide your conversations, or do you want to work it out alone? Sorting out communication plans early in your relationship can help for those times when you feel like you just aren't speaking the same language.

As king of soul Sam Cooke once sang on the subject of book smarts versus heart smarts, “I don't know much about history, don't know much biology... But I do know that I love you, and I know that if you love me too, what a wonderful world this could be.” Everyone has a different mix of skills — emotional, intellectual, and beyond — and that's what keeps life so interesting. Beyond EQ and IQ, common interests, physical attraction, the ability to make each other laugh, shared values and beliefs, communication skills, and trust can all play a role in impacting your relationship for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness, and in health.

Alice!

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Published date:

Jun 05, 2015

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