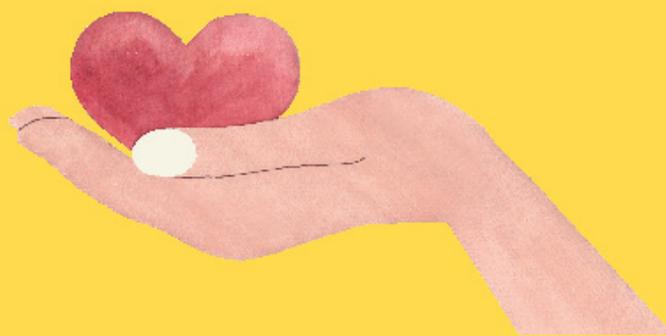


Things to Know Before You Say "Go"[™]

POWERFUL QUESTIONS
TO ASK BEFORE YOU
GIVE YOUR HEART AWAY
PROFESSIONAL GUIDE



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Things to Know Before You Say “Go”: Professional Guide

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Introduction

The *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* card set is a useful tool for relationship exploration and discussion. There are many ways to use this product in psychotherapy. The book that comes with the card set outlines several methods for exploration when an individual or couple examines the deck on their own. Familiarize yourself with these strategies (See How to Use These Cards, pp. 25 - 34, in the *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* book) and use them along with the ideas presented in this guide.

This Professional Guide outlines specific ways to use the cards in individual, couple, family, and group psychotherapy. Please modify and adjust the strategies to meet your personal and professional needs.

How I Developed these Cards

The idea for the deck began when I was working with a young woman, named Tanya, in therapy. She was clueless about what to look for in relationships and was putting herself at risk, physically and emotionally, as a result of her lack of knowledge. Her story follows. The cards were developed to help young women, like Tanya, be more protective of their hearts.

I now use these cards with women and men of all ages.

Tanya's story

As I sat in my office conducting an initial consultation for psychotherapy with a fourteen year old girl, Tanya, I was struck by her innocence, beauty, and naivete. She revealed stories of her chaotic home life and her drama-filled friendships. Towards the end of the session, she informed me she had lost her virginity the night prior, to a young man two years her senior. I inquired about her relationship with this young man. I was saddened and shocked by what little information she could relay to me about him (e.g., he was tall, cute, on the basketball team, named Jeremy, and he was at the party). That was it! She gave herself to a boy she hardly knew.

Aside from the issues of unprotected sex and pregnancy we began a discussion of relational readiness, qualities of good partnership, and emotional protection. These were topics no one had discussed with her. I began to wonder how many other young men and women were equally as unprepared in making such life changing decisions.

Over the next weeks and months, I worked with Tanya identifying the things she needed to know before she made herself vulnerable to intimacy. We made lists and discussed all the areas of concern I could imagine worth exploring. Tanya was hungry for this information. Eventually I made a set of cards for her and titled it, *Things to Know Before You Say "Go."*

Tanya's relationship with Jeremy ended as quickly as it started. She was wounded and angry, having hoped for something much more than was promised. Months later Tanya began dating a new young man. She was cautious and thoughtful as she approached romance this time. She reported one day she and her new boyfriend

had spent hours looking through and discussing the *Things to Know Before You Say "Go"* cards. I felt a great relief that Tanya's consciousness had been raised and her decisions had become more intentional.

Knowing I was on to something (i.e., that young people will look at cards as a way to explore relationship health and wisdom) I expanded the cards to include issues beyond adolescent concerns. I offered the cards to divorced women, single men, mothers and grandmothers, to see if the expanded content applied. Overwhelmingly, the response to the cards was positive. I hired a designer to make the cards visually appealing and printed up several hundred decks. These sold out within a year to a mostly professional audience and I decided to take the deck to the public market.

The deck has been selling well to the general public (it has even been made into an iPhone app, called [The Questions](#)) but there remains an underlying intention, which is to use these cards as a tool in therapy. The questions offer opportunities for potent and challenging conversations that may be missed if read outside a therapeutic environment.

My encouragement to you, as a professional educator or therapist, is to use the deck with your clients to stir deep discussions about relationship expectations and choices. Help your clients look at what is working and not working for them in their relationships. Empower them to use these cards as a rational balance to the often overwhelming emotions of infatuation or early love. Help the next generation of children to come from conscientious parents who have chosen each other with intention. Conscious parents will be more likely to raise awake and choice-filled children who will, in turn, be able to steer this world forward with intention.

Why Use these Cards?

There are many books on the market to help individuals examine relationship readiness. These books are invaluable to many people. But there are several reasons to suggest your clients use the *Things to Know Before You Say "Go"* cards in addition to books. Using these cards to explore partnership preferences and expectations can be valuable for a number of reasons:

1) The cards allow for a **more contemplative and reflective** experience than a book. Each card is held separately in the client's hand while he or she holds the question in their heart. This design encourages the client to sit with the question, slowly and quietly ponder the ideas presented, and come up with a personal conclusion, all before shifting their focus to the next question.

2) The cards allow for a **sorting process**, and this is uniquely different from a book. The client is asked to place the cards in a designated stack. Typically the cards are sorted into three piles: positive, negative, and unknown responses to the questions. The result offers the reader (the client), a personal and powerful depiction of the results of their inquiry.

3) The cards invite the client to **make a decision** about the question based on their individual beliefs and desires. The client is asked to decide, through the sorting process, if the person they are reviewing positively or negatively matches their criteria. This decision-making opportunity is more forthright in comparison to a book.

4) The sorting and stacking process reveals an **impactful visual indication** in response to their inquiry. By stacking the cards into relevant categories the client gets a visual presentation of how the person in question stacks up. The end result is visible and undeniable. A book cannot offer such clear and direct feedback.

5) Cards provide a means for obtaining information in very **small doses**. When a person is reluctant to read a whole book, they can simply pick one or two cards to reflect upon without feeling overwhelmed. Each card and question can be explored separately and in its own time.

6) Cards provide a means for **interactivity and dialogue**. The cards provide an easy format for sharing and discussing. The nature of the cards invite the reader to look through the deck with someone else to get their opinion or response.

7) The cards provide a **tactile experience** making the process of examining and answering the questions very personal. The question is literally put into the lap of the reader.

8) Cards are *fun!*

Using the Cards with Psychotherapy Clients

Individual Psychotherapy

Whether the client is currently in a relationship, ending a relationship, or looking for a relationship, the cards will stir dialogue about the qualities they value in partnership.

Sort the Entire Deck

You can use any of the sort techniques, which are outlined in the *Things to Know Before You Say "Go"* book, or on the back of the title card of the deck, to divide the deck into relevant piles. Identify sorts that speak most closely to your client's current needs and concerns. If they are single, for example, they might sort the deck into negotiable and nonnegotiable qualities of partnership. If they are in a relationship, they can examine their partnership before they deepen their involvement. The cards can also be used to identify qualities an individual possesses or lacks in the relationships they have had in their lives.

Sorting the entire deck takes some time, if it is done thoroughly. It may be helpful to allow several sessions to complete a full sort and explore the relevant conversations. Printing the [List of Questions](#) (from the [CourageToBloom.com](#) website) will allow you to mark the questions that have been sorted, allowing you to stop the sort and discussion process and finish up another time.

Sort Three

My preferred method for sorting, no matter the relationship status or intention, is to ask the client to pick just three cards at random from the deck. This small sort is much less overwhelming than sorting through the entire deck.

After pulling three cards, choose one question to discuss thoroughly, reading both front and back sides of the card. Do the same with the other two cards and then introduce the idea of sorting. Ask the client to review the three questions and place the cards in one of three piles; a) positive, b) negative, and c) I don't

know. Allow time for discussion and then pull three more cards and follow the same process. After a bit, you and the client will begin to see how the piles are stacking up. Print the [List of Questions](#) to keep track of cards that have been pulled, discussed, and sorted. This will allow you to stop the sorting and return to it later without losing your place.

After the Sort

After the cards have been sorted, you now have a visual representation of how the cards stack up. You may wish to ask one or more of the following questions:

- What does the sort tell you about how much you already know? (i.e., How many cards are in the positive and negative piles versus the I don't know pile?)
- How much information are you still in need of acquiring? How might you gather this information?
- What is the balance of negative to positive responses? What does this mean to you?
- Are you willing and able to accept the negative aspects of the relationship you are evaluating? What skills might be helpful in accepting the things that are challenging?

If the client sorted the deck for the qualities they bring to a relationship, you may wish to focus on which qualities they are most proud of and which ones they are most interested in altering or improving.

Pick-A-Card Method

This is an easy method for exploring the *Things to Know Before You Say "Go"* deck. Because you are only pulling a single card, this method has lots of time flexibility. You can discuss any card in a minute, or allow it to lead to a conversation that takes up an entire session. The client can either pull a card at random or briefly look through the deck to find a card they wish to discuss.

After the card is chosen, invite the client to read the question, both front and back sides. Discuss these questions as they relate to the client's values or as they relate to a person of interest (current,

past, or future partner). Ask the client to explain why they think this question was included in the deck and why it is an important issue to consider in a relationship.

Any of the following questions can be used to stir deeper conversation:

- How might this be an important thing to know in the dating process?
- What might be the consequences of not knowing this information?
- Have you ever been hurt or injured by not knowing the answer to this question or by seeing the answer too late?
- How would you rate the person you're interested in in regards to this question?
- Can you give an example that supports your conclusion?
- How do you measure up on this quality? Is this something that you wish to adjust in any way?
- Was this a question your parents stopped to ask when they were dating? What is the consequence of this?

Homework

You may lend out your deck so your client can take it home in order to sort the cards on their own time. If they complete a sort, it is often helpful to ask them to clearly identify their sorts by rubber banding the cards or making a list of relevant cards using the [List of Questions](#). They can then bring the cards, in their sorted form, to their next session. Follow up in subsequent session using the questions above as a way to expand your discussion.

If sorting the entire deck is overwhelming to your client, you may wish to suggest the client pick their top five or ten cards to discuss in the next session.

Evaluating a Bad Relationship

When a client is in a relationship that isn't going well, the deck can be a powerful clarifying tool. In this situation, ask the client to identify the areas of concern by sorting the cards into stacks of

“fulfilled,” “unfulfilled,” and “questionable,” as they relate to the person they are reviewing. Seeing the degree to which they are unfulfilled may give them the courage to speak up about their longings and desires. This awareness may also give them the clarity that it’s time to end the relationship.

It may also become visible, in evaluating a challenging relationship, that there is enough good in the relationship to work through the hassles and conflicts. In this situation the cards can be used to identify the specific areas of concern and begin to build a plan and strategies for addressing these concerns in their relationship.

Couples Psychotherapy

When working with couples, the cards can be used to explore what the individuals in the relationship know and understand about each other. Expectations, frustrations, and appreciations can all be identified as couples work with the deck. Use the deck as a relationship clarification and enhancement tool, rather than a means for amplifying the problems and deficits in individuals or the partnership.

Couples may wish to use any of the sort options in session (i.e., sort the entire deck, pick three, or Pick-A-Card method) or take the deck home as homework. If the couple is in crisis or the relationship is unstable and conflictual, it may be best to explore the deck in session where a skilled therapist can guide the conversation.

As the couple reads and answers the questions, watch how they approach the material. Look for the presence or absence of deep listening, avoidance, minimizing, and other indicators of strength or deficit. Use these observations and experiences as teaching opportunities to practice new skills or explore new territory.

Questions to ask once the couple has explored the deck:

- What did you learn about yourself and your expectations for relationship?
- Did you learn anything new about your partner in this exploration?
- What areas of concern were you able to identify?
- What stands out as the area of greatest vulnerability in your relationship?
- What appreciations did you notice as you examined your relationship?
- What is there still to learn about your partner?
- Were you able to deeply listen to your partner's concerns, even if you may disagree?

Parent/Child Dialogue

The cards provide an excellent means for starting or deepening conversations between parents and adolescent children. A variety of parent/child sorts are suggested here. Find a creative and engaging way for both parents and children to feel involved in the process of exploration.

Here are some sort suggestions:

1. A parent and/or child can sort the deck according to their **values**.
 - a. Make stacks of cards that speak to highly, moderately, and less important values.
 - b. Explore the deck and identify their top 10 questions.
3. A parent can examine the deck and identify their current **concerns** for their child's romantic interest. A teen can do the same and see if their concerns match those of their parent.
4. The adolescent and/or parent can sort the deck according to what they believe to be **relevant and irrelevant issues** for themselves in dating.
5. An adolescent or parent can **pick five** cards to discuss in therapy.
6. A simple activity of **pulling one card** at random to discuss is easy and can lead to great conversations.

Deepen the dialogue by inviting examples, making observations, or asking additional questions. Discussion questions could include:

- Why did the author include this question in the deck? How is this relevant to dating or relationships?
- Is this an issue in your current situation? How so?
- What is the potential danger of not knowing the answer to this question?
- Can you give me an example to explain your response to this card?
- Do you think your parents asked this question of each other when they were dating?

Groups

The *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* cards can be used in many ways to provide a structure for a group, whether therapeutic or educational. Below are some suggestions of the types of groups that may be served well by the cards.

The settings in which these groups can be offered are numerous. Church groups, schools, after-school programs, libraries, and therapy centers are some obvious options. The offering of a group is a fantastic way to build community connections, increase visibility, and build a professional reputation of service.

If you are interested in structured activities to use with the cards you may want to look at the [*Things to Know Before You Say “Go” Activity Book*](#). Designed for young adults, this 69 page book provides ideas for 30 activities to play using the *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* cards. The *Activity Book* is designed for high school students and is often integrated into the sex education instruction. The *Activity Book* is published by the [Dibble Institute](#) and is available at [CourageToBloom.com](#).

Psycho-Educational Group for Singles

Here is a detailed structure for a four week singles group:

- Group for single adults, ages 21 and older, four to eight participants.
- Four hour-and-a-half long sessions.
- Each participant will need their own set of cards.

Week One: Introduce the cards by having each group member pull one card from a shared deck. Ask them to read the card to the group and explain why that question is an important question to ask. Read comments in the book related the question and discuss. Give each participant their own deck and assign homework.

Homework: Ask each member to take the deck home and sort it according to their priorities (negotiable and non-negotiable). Ask them to rubber band their sorts together so that they can be

discussed at the next session. Ask group members to identify their top five priorities from their non-negotiable pile.

Week Two: Ask each participant to take out all the cards in their non-negotiable pile. Ask, how many cards they each had in this stack. Invite each person to share and discuss their top five priorities with the group. If time permits you may ask members to discuss the questions they thought were of little or no importance. Encourage exchange and dialogue. Use the book to expand the conversations as needed.

Homework: Ask each member to sort their deck as it relates to a current or past relationship, putting them in three piles (positive, negative, and neutral). Again, ask them to rubber band their sorts so their responses can be discussed.

Week Three: Ask each group member, one by one, to share and discuss what they learned about their relationship with the person they identified in their sort. Read the questions on page 31 in the book as a guide for sharing.

Homework: Ask members to sort the deck as a self-examination of the qualities making two piles, the qualities they possess and the qualities they lack in creating a healthy, sustainable relationship. Keep the two piles separated by rubber bands and bring to the next group.

Week Four: Invite group members to discuss what they discovered about their own relationship skills. What strengths do they possess? What skills are lacking? Explore how the deficit skills can be learned so a healthy partnership is more attainable. Discuss the various things they learned in the four weeks about their priorities, their choices for relationship, and the areas in which they wish to continue to grow.

Parent-Child Group

The purpose of a parent-child group is to expose and explore the various issues a young single person needs to know in order to make a conscious and informed choice in partnership. Parents who want their children to think wisely and cautiously about the dating process would value this type of group. Younger adults tend to love the cards. They are often willing to hear relationship wisdom from this objective source where they may be reticent to consider the same information coming from their own parents.

A group of 3 to 5 parent-child dyads is easy to manage. The best ages for the children depends on their sophistication and readiness to address this topic. 12-year-olds may be able to handle this but it may be more appropriate for teens and even early twenty-year-olds and their parent(s).

The format can vary from a short one to two hour presentation to a whole day long event. Many factors would come into play in developing and running such a group (e.g. ages of participants, sophistication of the parents, time and space constraints).

In running these groups you may wish to separate the adults from the youth for part of the time, if appropriate, so the cards can be examined among peers. This seems to allow more vulnerable and honest sharing. The parents can openly talk about their concerns and fears and the youth can do the same without fear of reprimand. The groups can be reunited for discussion after each has identified the concerns they wish to address with the other. A spokesperson from each group can speak for the group as a way to avoid direct confrontation between specific parent-child dyads.

The issues that can come up in the parent group discussion often include excessive strictness and limits, tendency to say too much, and difficulty with really listening. Appearance of these issues can be a jumping off point for deeper discussion about the effects of the parent's style of communicating.

The teen children often identify a great sense of fear in talking directly to their parents about relationships. They may need to learn new strategies for addressing their concerns with their parents or identify other sources for support and exploration.

Teen Groups

The *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* cards provide an attractive and engaging means to build dialogue with teens about romantic relationships. Teens seem naturally drawn to exploring the cards. I find that dialogues with peers flow freely from the spark of any of the questions.

At the request of the Dibble Institute, an organization that teaches relationship skills to teens in schools, I wrote the [*Things to Know Before You Say “Go” Activity Book*](#), a curriculum guide for use with the cards. This book includes ideas for 30 activities to play using the *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* cards. The *Activity Book* would be helpful for both small and large groups of teens. The activities are highly adaptable to suit the needs of various settings and differing skill levels of the participants. The *Activity Book* is published by the [Dibble Institute](#) and is available at [CourageToBloom.com](#).

Ideas from Others

If you would like to contribute your ideas and experiences with using the *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* cards in new settings or in new ways, I would be delighted to include your ideas (with full credit) in future publications of this Professional Guide. Please submit your ideas by email to elsbeth@couragetobloom.com.

Conclusion

The *Things to Know Before You Say “Go”* deck and book is a wonderful tool to help enhance the process of partnership selection. It is a direct means for raising consciousness about beliefs, values, and expectations in relationships. It is challenging and invites the reader/client to deeply examine and express their self-identified preferences.

Make the tool your own by finding ways to use it that fit your unique needs and circumstances. I would be delighted to receive your feedback. Please email me at elsbeth@CourageToBloom.com.