

# eye-opening truths that help wives, husbands and parents

Relationships are often transformed when someone suddenly “gets” something they just didn’t know about their spouse or child. Below is a sampling of a few key “Aha moments” from 10 years of interviews and nationally-representative surveys with more than 12,000 men, women and teens by social researcher Shaunti Feldhahn.

(Note that these are survey-based generalizations and there are always exceptions. Also, this primer is not tailored to deep systemic problems such as abuse or addiction.)



## about men

(see *for women only*: what you need to know about the inner lives of men)

### 1. He looks confident – but has so much self-doubt

Despite his “in control” exterior, a man often feels like an imposter. He deeply wants to be a great husband or dad, but is worried about being found out as inadequate (his most painful feeling). His wife can hit this vulnerable, raw nerve without intending to (“That isn’t the way you do it!”). But through regular affirmation, she can also build him up into the great man he is longing to be. (“You are such a great dad.”)

*Survey says: 76% of men said, “I am not always as confident as I look.” 69% are powerfully affected by hearing “you did a great job at that.”*

### 3. For him, sex is primarily an emotional need.

At the most basic level, men want to be wanted sexually. Feeling desired gives a man confidence and a sense of well-being in all other areas of his life – where feeling that his wife doesn’t desire him creates a lack of well-being.

*Research Shows: 97% of men surveyed said getting enough sex wasn’t by itself enough; they wanted to feel wanted.*

### 5. Seeing attractive (sexual) images, his brain first has an involuntary response and then a voluntary one

On visual-sexual stimuli, where most female brains have a thinking-oriented response (“Wow, he’s attractive”), nearly all male brains have an involuntary physiological response to visually consume the image. Even happily married men struggle with being pulled toward live and recollected images of other women – and they wish they didn’t have this temptation. Once it hits, they have to make the choice to tear down those thoughts. Men are helped by the understanding and support of their wives in this minefield of a culture.

*Research shows: 98% of men responded ‘I can’t not notice’ when a woman is dressing to call attention to a good figure – but they can control what they think and do next.*

### 2. He needs respect so much he would give up love to get it.

Just as inadequacy is a man’s most painful feeling, feeling respected is his greatest need. Just as a woman needs to know he loves her even when she is unlovable that day, he needs to know she appreciates, respects and trusts him even when he makes mistakes.

*Survey says: 74% of men said if they had to choose, they would give up feeling loved if they could just feel respected. Instead of hearing “I love you”, 72% of men are powerfully affected by hearing “thank you.”*

### 4. The male brain processes best when there is time to think first, then talk.

During conflict when she is pushing to ‘talk it out’ to get resolution and feel reassured, he often needs to pull away... not to avoid the issue but so he can think it through and better talk about it later.

*Research Shows: 71% of men (or more) said if they don’t want to talk during conflict it is to allow time to process, avoid hurting her, and/or get a better result.*

(see flip side for “about women,” “about teens”)

# about women

(see *for men only*: a straightforward guide to the inner lives of men)



## 1. She needs to know every day, “he would choose me all over again”

Just because he said “I do,” doesn’t make her feel permanently loved. Inside even the most confident woman in a great relationship, is a latent “am I loveable/would he choose me again?” insecurity. When that insecurity is triggered, she may seem unlovable right when she most needs reassurance. And his simple, daily actions of pursuit (e.g. taking her hand) can often prevent that insecurity in the first place.

*Research Shows: 82% of women have this insecurity. In conflict, 86% say hearing him say “we’re okay” gives the reassurance needed.*

## 2. Women want emotional security more than financial security.

A woman’s primary need is not financial security but emotional closeness. So when he gives more time to work because he loves and wants to provide for her, she feels work is a higher priority and is insecure of his love. She wants his family attention more than anything else he could provide.

*Research Shows: 70% of married women said they would endure financial insecurity if that was what it took to get closeness with him.*

## 3. If she wants less sex, it’s about her brain chemistry not his desirability

Although a man thinks her lower interest means he’s not desirable (a depressing thought), it’s usually just a physiological difference. Where men often have “assertive desire” (tied to testosterone), women often have “receptive desire.” She enjoys sex just as much when it’s happening, but doesn’t think about it as much and needs “anticipation time” to have the same interest. She also may need to feel closer outside the bedroom.

*Research shows: 96% of women who wanted less sex than their husbands indicated that it had nothing to do with his desirability. Instead, for 60% it was primarily a physiological difference.*



# about teens and tweens

(see *for parents only*: getting inside the head of your kid)

## 1. Freedom is a more powerful influence than peer pressure

Their new freedom is intoxicating, and even good kids can make bad choices when “under the influence” of freedom – and out of fear of losing it (e.g. a cell phone or the ability to drive). When discipline is needed, it seems proportional when parents reserve the loss of key freedoms only for “nuclear bomb” infractions.

*Research Shows: 89% of teens said when they do something parents wouldn’t approve of, it’s not because of rebellion or peer pressure but because they want freedom: the ability to do what they want to do.*

## 2. Kids need to be able to ask “who am I?” questions without parents viewing them as rejection

In middle school, kids realize that while they know who their parents are, they don’t know who they are. They test parents’ values – which looks like rejection but is really asking “who am I and what do I believe?” The more parents push their identity, the more the teen urgently needs distance to question. But if parents allow questions (while

making their own beliefs clear), the more likely a teen is to adopt their parents’ core beliefs.

*Research Shows: 81% said even if they were questioning their parents’ values, they secretly wanted to know that those beliefs were there, that they could return to as part of their own identity.*

## 3. Teens really do want to talk to you ... if you will learn how to listen.

“You don’t listen to me” means you aren’t listening to my feelings. When a child is a jangling ball of emotions, they’ll only feel heard if you ignore fixing the problem for a moment and pull out those emotions (“Oh that must have been embarrassing, I’m so sorry.” Rather than “I’m going to call the teacher right now!”). And kids want to talk if they know parents will remain calm no matter what they say, rather than “freaking out.”

*Research Shows: 81% of kids said they needed parents to acknowledge feelings before fixing a problem. 74% would want to share things if they knew parents wouldn’t freak out.*