



# Marriage Foundation

Press Release from Marriage Foundation

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## Want a relationship? Better mind your Ps & Qs

Women and men value honesty, kindness and good manners above all other qualities they seek in a partner, finds a major new study from the Marriage Foundation.

The study, ***Green flags & Red flags: What women and men really want***, identified good manners/politeness as a top characteristic that both men and women look for in a partner, challenging other studies which claim manners are seen as old-fashioned and outdated by Gen Z.

Marriage Foundation commissioned Whitestone Insight to ask 2,000 young adults aged 18-35 what they look for in a partner (green flags), and what were the biggest turn-offs (red flags). The survey found 86 per cent of women and 74 per cent of men said “honesty” was the number one green flag, followed by “kindness” (80 per cent/68 per cent), “friendship” (72 per cent/65 per cent), “interest” (69 per cent/60 per cent) and being “polite/good manners” (67 per cent/53 per cent) as very important. At the bottom of the list of important traits were “looks” (23 per cent/35 per cent) and “practicality” (36 per cent/31 per cent).

By contrast, the biggest red flags were: “putdowns in public”, identified by 87 per cent of women and 69 per cent of men, “putdowns in private” (81 per cent/59 per cent) and being “flirty to other people” (69 per cent/54 per cent).

Mirroring the importance of politeness and good manners, nearly six in 10 women (57 per cent) and over four in 10 men (43 per cent) said bad manners were a deal breaker. While talking about yourself (21 per cent/15 per cent) and previous partners (19 per cent/24 per cent) were the least important red flags.

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation’s Research Director commented: “Some of these findings might seem unsurprising, like the desire for a partner to be kind and honest, but others, such as the need for a partner to have good manners, identified by over two-thirds of women and more than half of men, were something of a shock. Indeed, some surveys have suggested that traditional manners were seen as old-fashioned, even outdated, but as

our data clearly shows, if you want to attract a partner, you had better be kind and watch your Ps and Qs.”

Although there were some minor variations in attitudes depending on age, social class and religion, gender had a significant impact on the views of those who responded. The study found that women, in almost every category, were more likely to say that a particular trait was important, for example, eight in 10 (81 per cent) of women said that putdowns in private were a red flag, compared to six in 10 (59 per cent) of men, a variance of 22 per cent. “For most characteristics, women were more likely than men to say they were ‘very important’. The biggest green flag for women was honesty, rated by 86 per cent of women as ‘very important’. This was followed by kindness at 80 per cent, friendship 72 per cent, interest 69 per cent, politeness 67 per cent, and empathy 63 per cent. Fewer than 4 per cent rate any of these characteristics as ‘not particularly’ or ‘not at all important,’” the report says.

“There is then a notable gap down to ambition, intelligence, being practical, and good looks, rated as ‘very important’ by fewer than 40 per cent of women. A significant minority of women also regard these as ‘not particularly important’, with 22 per cent rating looks as least important.”

It continued: “For men, the pattern is remarkably similar, with honesty, kindness, friendship and interest as the top green flags. Similarly, less than 9% rate any of these as not particularly important’. However, it is notable that fewer men than women rate any of these as ‘very important’.

“Among the less important characteristics, just as for women, are ambition, intelligence, being practical, and good looks. While only 30-40 per cent of men rate these ‘very important’, more men also rate these ‘not particularly important’, with 30 per cent of men rating ambition as least important.”

Marital status also impacts the results, with significantly more married men and women saying that intelligence, ambition, being practical and looks were important, rising by around 10 percentage points in each of those categories.

Similarly, with the red flags, marital and relationship status led to significant variations in some categories for both men and women. For married and single women, previous partners was identified by around a quarter (25 per cent and 22 per cent respectively) as a negative, but among non-married women in a relationship, this dropped to just one in 10 (11 per cent). An almost identical pattern to the men, with 30 per cent of married men and 24 per cent of singles saying previous patterns was a negative, but just 11 per cent of men in a relationship identifying this as an issue.

The report concludes: “...Young adult men and women both want much the same things from their relationships: honesty, kindness, friendship, interest, politeness and empathy. They are generally less bothered by ambition, intelligence, being practical or good looking.

“These top few ‘green flags’ are even more important to women than to men, while the other qualities become more important to both men and women when they marry.

“Much the same pattern emerges among qualities to avoid. Young adult men do not want to be put down in public or private. These are the biggest relationship ‘red flags’. Nor do they want partners who are flirty or bad-mannered. While they are less bothered by other characteristics such as slowness to commit, partnership history, and willingness to take criticism, these characteristics become more important to men and women when they marry.”

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation’s Research Director, concluded: “The results show that overwhelmingly both men and women look for the same things in a potential partner or their spouse. They value honesty, kindness and good manners, while shunning those who are rude, flirty and bad-mannered. These findings would almost certainly not look out of place for previous generations, just as our previous studies have found that most young people (87 per cent) want to marry, including a majority of those in every socioeconomic group and those who had met their partner using so-called hook apps such as Tinder and Grindr. Further proof that a belief in what some might call traditional values and that marriage remains the gold standard of relations is alive and kicking in our country today.”

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to editors**

**Methodology note:** *Whitestone surveyed 2008 UK adults between the ages of 18-35 on DAY-MONTH 2025. Data were weighted to be representative of all adults. Whitestone is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.*

#### **About Marriage Foundation**

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

Sir Paul Coleridge, Harry Benson and Michaela Hyde from the Marriage Foundation are available for comment and for interviews linked to these new findings.

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