

# Conversational Lessons

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## **Dear Dr. Yael:**

I prepare young, impending brides with proper knowledge of the *halachos* and *hashkofos* that pertain to them. In relation to the latter, I tell my students that we should not use the words “always” or “never” since marriage is a great challenge that both parties need to work on every day.

As a *kallah* teacher trying to instill proper values in my students in order for them to lead healthy and productive marriages, I am greatly concerned about today’s rising divorce figures. To that end, I’d like to share with your readers the number one point I stress to my *kallahs*: *Do not invite competition into your marriages.*

Here are three examples related to this advice:

1) You inform your husband that you are helping your close friend find her *bashert*. Your friend is beautiful, has a great personality, is thin, comes from a wealthy family, and is smart – but

not too smart. These qualities will make her the perfect wife. You then insist to your husband that he must know someone for this great girl.

Despite your attempt to help your friend, your husband – who loves you – may think to himself: “Where was this girl when I was dating?” Why would you want to put such a thought into his mind? Now ponder the reverse scenario. Imagine your husband telling you that he has a handsome friend who is tall, well dressed, an amazing learner and a *masmid* with great *middos*. Additionally, his parents have a trust fund set up for him. In short, he comes from a loving, wealthy family. These facts may prompt you to think: “Where was this guy when I was dating?”

*The lesson:* Help your friends get married – but not by praising them too much. Doing so might be to your detriment.

2) You just returned from visiting your friend in the hospital following her delivery. You tell your husband that she looks amazing – she is back to a size 4 – even after just giving birth. Meanwhile, you’re still trying to shed the 20 lbs. you gained during your pregnancy more than a year ago.

*The lesson:* Think twice before telling your husband how great your friend looks just after giving birth. Doing so is potentially self-destructive.

3) You are a member of a large, warm, loving, *heimishe*, chassidishe family.

You and your eight siblings are close in age and married. All of you live near each other and get together often. Your mother, an outstanding *balabasta*, hosts great Shabbos and *Yom Tov* meals. At one of those meals, you tell your sister sitting next to you (your husbands are sitting across from you) that you can’t wait for the meal to be over, as you’ve been awake since 5 a.m. taking care of the kids and you need a nap.

Your sister tells you that her husband knew that she was tired, so he awoke early, diapered and fed all the kids, and even left for shul later than usual so she could sleep till 10 a.m.

*The lesson:* Don’t start this dialogue, for you run the risk of feeling that your sister husband’s cares more for her than your husband does for you.

I stress to my students to follow this advice in order to have a happy marriage. I urge them to not breed jealousy with family and friends. And I implore them to not compare their marriages

to anyone else's. Competition has no place in a marriage.

I hope that my thoughts help alleviate today's soaring divorce rate – while increasing the cases of *shalom bayis* in our community.

M.G.

**Dear M.G.:**

Thank you for your helpful letter. I agree that we should never invite competition into our marriages.

Here are some of my examples regarding what not to do in your marriage or your friends' marriages:

1) Never speak negatively about your friend's husband. Never say, "He really does not deserve you." Even if your friend confides in you in regards to one of her husband's shortcomings, do not remind her of about it later. Instead, find a way to speak positively about him. Say something like, "Your husband is such a nice person." Don't overdo it, but be genuinely positive about your friend's husband.

2) Practice *hachnassas orchim* – even by inviting a very attractive single or divorced friend for a Shabbos or *Yom Tov seudah*. But do not make her a *bas bayis*. While socializing with friends is always a kind gesture, maintain boundaries. That is the prudent and safe thing to do.

3) Do not double date, as it can place you in a number of inappropriate situations. Married couples that spend many hours together on vacations or at Shabbos meals create unhealthy situations that can lead to boundary issues. Stick to going out only with your husband. While an occasional Shabbos or *Yom Tov* meal with another couple is fine, focus on spending alone time with your spouse.

Unfortunately, the divorce rate in the *frum* community has risen sharply in the past decade or so – increasing by some estimates to as high as 20-25 percent. These numbers are frightening, as are many cases I witness in my therapy practice.

I wish you *hatzlachah* in all of your endeavors. May Hashem grant you *gefen: gezunt, parnassah and nachas!*