

# the knot

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Actor and**  
**Activist**  
**Kat Graham**  
**Marries**  
**Bryant Wood**

**ONES TO**  
**WATCH**  
21 WEDDING  
PROS YOU  
NEED TO  
KNOW

## A LOVE WORTH CELEBRATING

**“No matter what you go  
through or where you come  
from, just give yourself a  
wedding. Just do it.”**

— *Kat Graham*



**Wedding**  
**Party**  
**Confessionals**



# Is Financial Compatibility More Important Than Sexual Compatibility?

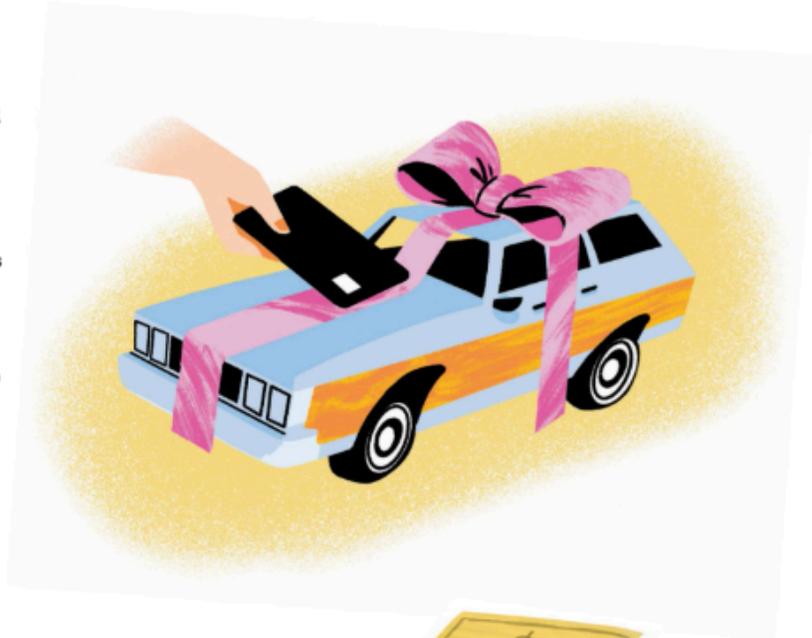
We hear about sexual compatibility all the time, yet have you ever heard your friends chat about financial compatibility over coffee? It's arguably just as — or dare we say, even more — important.

By Elana Lyn Gross  
Illustrations by Nicole Album

## MONEY MONEY MONEY

**“Who you decide to partner with can be one of the biggest financial decisions of your life,”** says Traci Williams, a board-certified psychologist and certified financial therapist at Healthy Wealthy Roots. **“People enter relationships with their own money beliefs, feelings and behaviors. Ensuring these work together is crucial for both the health of the relationship and your financial future.”**

**So how do you determine whether you’re financially compatible with your partner? And, more importantly, can you increase your compatibility? We dialed the experts.**



### Why Financial Compatibility Is Crucial

Money impacts every part of your relationship, from paying your day-to-day bills to reaching major milestones that matter to you, like having your dream wedding and honeymoon, buying a home, growing your family and saving for retirement. When you have shared financial habits and goals, you feel like you’re working together instead of against each other.

“You need to be able to communicate with each other about what your financial goals are, what you want your lifestyle to look like, how you’re going to afford that lifestyle, where the money’s coming from and where it’s going,” says Aja Evans, a certified financial therapist who helps individuals and couples understand their financial values and stressors.



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### How to Assess Financial Compatibility

**You’ve hopefully talked about big topics** like kids, religion, politics, work, family dynamics, goals and your core values before taking big steps. Think meeting the parents, moving in together, getting engaged and saying your vows. But have you talked about your financial literacy and your money habits and goals? You should, and here’s why.

Communicating openly and honestly can help you mitigate money disagreements and financial anxiety. Money is a major stressor for Americans and one of the leading causes of divorce. “Being able to have these kinds of conversations about finances is not just about communication but about meeting the other person where they are and understanding their past, present and future financial goals,” Evans says.



"My favorite thing to share with couples is that couples who talk about money report feeling closer than those who don't. When you take money from being a taboo topic to something you can openly discuss, it becomes a tool for connection and intimacy," says Lindsay Bryan-Podvin, a licensed master social worker, certified financial therapist and founder of Mind Money Balance.

To figure out whether you're financially compatible, you need to get financially intimate. Getting "financially naked" can help you connect and be equal partners in your money life, regardless of who earns more.

So where to start? We asked the experts to share topics that will help you evaluate your financial compatibility.

### Your personal finances:

Talk about any details you haven't already shared, like your incomes, savings, debts, credit scores and major expenses. "Look for signs of financial responsibility, such as consistent saving, low or manageable debt, timely bill payments and a willingness to talk openly about money," says Janelle Sallenave, the chief spending officer at Chime.

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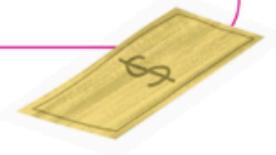
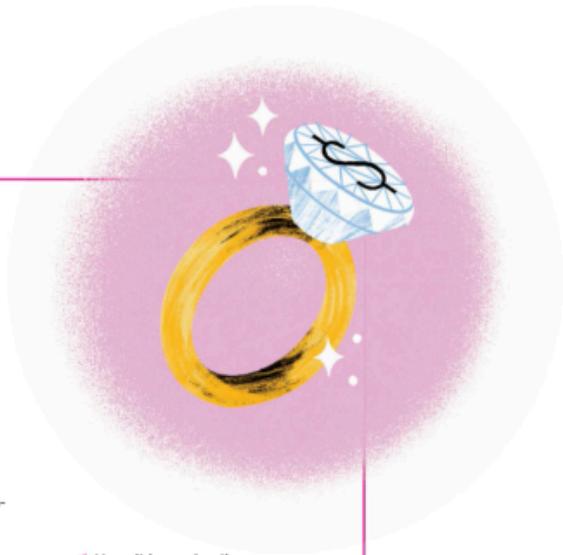


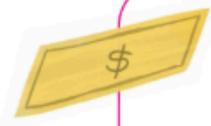
## QUESTIONS TO ASK TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU'RE FINANCIALLY COMPATIBLE

Sallenave shared five questions you can ask each other and what they reveal.

- ◆ **What are your biggest financial goals in the next 5 to 10 years?** Understanding long-term priorities can help you get aligned on a vision for the future.
- ◆ **Do you prefer to save aggressively or spend on experiences?** This clarifies your spending styles to help manage lifestyle expectations.
- ◆ **How do you feel about debt, and do you currently have any?** This opens up honest dialogue about financial obligations and attitudes toward debt and borrowing money.
- ◆ **How much financial independence do you want within our relationship?** This helps define boundaries and preferences.

- ◆ **How did your family handle money when you were growing up?** Exploring past experiences can reveal money mindsets and habits, helping each person better understand how their partner approaches finances.





## Questions to Ask to Determine How to Manage Your Finances

Salleneve shared five questions you can ask each other and why they're helpful.

◆ **Are we at a stage where combining some of our money feels practical?** Reflect on your relationship milestones to see if merging finances makes sense right now.

◆ **Would we feel more comfortable with a joint account, separate accounts or a combination of both?** Explore different account setups to find what fits your comfort levels and needs.

◆ **What shared expenses or goals are we working toward?** Identify common financial priorities like rent, travel or saving for a home.

◆ **How should we divide financial responsibilities?** Discuss who will handle tasks like paying bills and managing savings.

◆ **How can we make our plan feel fair, flexible and aligned with our lifestyles?** Ensure your approach supports both of your values, habits and evolving needs.

### Your money habits:

Everyone has different comfort levels around saving and spending money. Some people lean more heavily toward one or the other. Don't worry if you don't line up completely. "A lot of times we balance each other out. The spender might teach us how to live and experience life more deeply now, and the saver helps us remember our future and goals," says Ashley Feinstein Gerstley, a certified financial planner and founder of The Fiscal Femme.

If you are polar opposites and can't find a way to meet in the middle, it could lead to frequent money fights, stress and emotional distance, Bryan-Podvin explains. "Conflicts arise when there's no effort to compromise, and one partner feels unfairly pressured to adjust," she says.

ship can help us have compassion," says Feinstein Gerstley. She recommends asking your partner about their first money memory, their family's finances when they were a child and how their family handled money.

### Your personal money values:

It's likely that your current money beliefs stem from your past. "We all have different relationships with money that come from how we were raised, our experiences and those around us. Understanding what drives our partner's money relation-



PIGGY BANK: GETTY IMAGES



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Here's the good news: You don't have to split up because you're not financially compatible. If you put in the work, you can find ways to align and feel like you're on the same team.

#### Your individual financial goals:

Before discussing your joint financial goals, share your personal ones so they're factored into your planning. "Whether it's buying a home, traveling more or becoming debt-free, sharing your short-and long-term financial goals can reveal whether you're moving in the same direction," says Courtney Alev, a consumer financial advocate at Credit Karma. Just like you have your own hobbies and interests, it's okay if some financial goals don't match up. It's up to you whether you want to tackle individual goals like paying off student debt or buying a car independently or together.

#### Your financial issues:

Whether you have one joint account, separate accounts or a hybrid approach, you can still get into financial disagreements. It might seem easier to avoid the fight altogether, but that can lead to resentment and even financial infidelity, which is when people keep financial secrets from their partner. "A pattern of lying and keeping secrets is a red flag," says Bryan-Podvin.

If one partner frequently lies about their financial habits, it can lead to trust issues and financial repercussions.

Fighting fair is a sign of a healthy relationship, and how you fight about finances is no exception. "It's about how you treat each other and how you speak to one another about it. If there's constant disrespect toward someone in the relationship, that's not okay," says Bryan-Podvin.

#### How to Increase Your Financial Compatibility

**Here's the good news:** You don't have to split up because you're not financially compatible. If you put in the work, you can find ways to align and feel like you're on the same team. Here are some actionable strategies you can implement ASAP.

#### Decide how to manage your finances:

There are many different ways couples manage their finances, from opening one joint account to splitting shared expenses and paying for personal expenses like shopping, hobbies and activities with friends separately. "Explore options like merging accounts, keeping them separate or a hybrid approach, and choose what best fits your relationship and goals," says Sallenave. "Agree on financial boundaries. Be clear about what purchases or financial decisions should be made jointly versus independently to avoid misunderstandings," Alev says.



If you have separate accounts, consider how you want to contribute to joint expenses and find something that works for your relationship, whether it's splitting them straight down the middle or paying proportionally based on your incomes. "I worked with a couple who had a unique money management style because they had different incomes: One of them paid for big-ticket items like vacations, and the other would cover smaller 'treats' like happy hours or coffee dates. They each felt they were spending money on fun things for their partner that were within their respective budgets," Bryan-Podvin.

### Set shared and independent financial goals:

Do you want to buy a house? Make a dent in your mortgage? Decide what you want to accomplish together. "Align on big objectives while also making space for personal goals, so each partner feels empowered and respected," says Sallenave.

### Consider a prenuptial agreement:

Whether you just got engaged or are weeks away from your wedding, Alev suggests discussing how you want to protect your assets if you get divorced. It can be helpful to get a prenup if you have different net worths or incomes or you've had money concerns in your relationship. "You might never need it, but knowing your bases are covered can bring peace of mind," Alev says.

### Have monthly money dates:

When you're building a life together, you are going to have shared expenses regardless of how you decide to handle



### Money Date

Here are some topics you could discuss:

- Review last month's income and expenses and anticipate this month's
- Set your new monthly budget
- Decide how you'll manage shared expenses
- Track your progress toward short- and long-term goals
- Celebrate your financial wins. Cheers!



your finances. Add a money date to your regular routine.

"A money date, a designated time to regularly discuss finances, can help couples set and keep track of their financial goals. Couples can use this time to review bills, plan savings goals, track debt payoff and more," says Williams. Looking for another reason to make money dates a priority? "I've seen that couples who openly discuss their finances are less likely to have money-related arguments," Williams adds.

### See a financial therapist:

If you're dealing with financial infidelity, your money fights get heated or you feel like you're having the same disagreements frequently, it might be time to call in reinforcements. "Work with a financial therapist, a professional who can help couples understand how they feel and behave with money and improve how they communicate about their finances," says Williams.