

## Preparation for Expectations

Expectations influence everyone in both conscious and unconscious ways. Even when we want autonomy to live our life as an individual, we discover our beliefs, actions, and intentions bringing us back to ingrained expectations. Sometimes these expectations reflect societal norms, such as traffic rules; other times a person responds to familial norms like following table manners.

Families play a major role in expectations. Perhaps a family is musical and expects its members to joyfully play an instrument. These expectations may be natural for some family members, but children raised in the same family will respond to expectations in different ways because of individual genetics, environment, temperament, birth order, and gender. What happens when one child wants to play sports instead? Will that child be chastised or encouraged?

Family dynamics contribute to expectations on many levels. Children who experience love and support are likely to feel confident in their future. A child who witnesses or experiences abuse may take that expectation of human behavior into their adulthood.

Expectations have weight, meaning, and “flavor” if enough people follow them. Religious and cultural precepts can have significant influence that follow people through multiple generations. Expectations bind family, community and nations together. Consequences for rebellion may be as severe as alienation or as meaningless as just a shrug. Acceptance of the contrary person may be guaranteed or not.

Some expectations are created by chance and circumstance. Even the mundane can have profound influences on a person’s future. For example, what addresses did you have as a child? If you had lived on a different street, your friendships might have been entirely different. When you were looking for a new job, what was available? Who did you choose as a partner? Did you go through life as a single person? Each of these occurrences determine the course of a lifetime. Various expectations follow along.

Even if expectations promise an answer to big or small questions, perhaps it is in a more deliberate journey where value resides. It is up to the individual, the family, the group, the state, and the nation to push the limits of expectations if we are to grow and explore all possibilities.

*Here are some quotes for your reflection on different aspects of expectations.*

A youthful mind is seldom totally free from ambition; to curb that is the first step to contentment, since to curb expectation is the first step toward enjoyment. *Francis Burney*

The only way you can allow a kid to truly dream is if you expand their idea of what is currently possible. A kid who has nothing, sees nothing, and is taught nothing can only dream of breakfast. They can only hope to get to the next moment successfully. *W. Kamau Bell*

Life is so constructed, that the event does not, cannot, will not, match the expectation.

*Charlotte Bronte*

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to make the big choices in life. Because almost everything – all external expectations, all pride, all embarrassment or fear of failure – these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is most important. *Steve Jobs*

If I disappoint someone, it is their loss for putting that expectation on me when they don't know me. I can't control what they want. *Simone Biles*

Giving birth and nourishing,  
having without possessing,  
acting with no expectations,  
leading and not trying to control:  
this is the supreme virtue.  
*Tao, chapter 10 trans. Stephen Mitchell*

“Expectations are a funny thing,” Wen said. “When you're born with them, you resent them, fight against them. When you've never been given any, you feel the lack of them your whole life.” *Fonda Lee, Jade City*

We must rediscover the distinction between hope and expectation. *Ivan Illich*

## Questions to Ponder

1. In your family as you grew up, were expectations an issue? For reflection; you may not want to share.
2. Has anyone ever had an expectation about you that was unreasonable? Reflect on expectations that you have seen as reasonable and unreasonable at different points in your life.
3. What roles have family expectations played in your life?
4. What roles have society's expectations played in your life?
5. What societal expectations have you seen change? Consider some examples like abortion or homosexuality. How did these changes of expectation get decided in popular opinion, in the government, in our social practices, in your own views?
6. Has there ever been a time when your expectations and fears affected your response to a situation where there was a lot of uncertainty? How did that play out?
7. How will an immigrant or refugee be affected by society's expectations?

## Words of the Day

Before coming to the Gathering, reflect on the role of expectations in your life. The Words of the Day sentence is “An expectation that has influenced me is ...”