

F O C U S

WINTER 2014

Everything You Need To Know About Premarital Counseling

While you're planning for your wedding, are you also preparing for your marriage? According to a survey published in the Journal of Family Psychology, couples with premarital education reported higher levels of marital satisfaction and experienced a 30 percent decline in the likelihood of divorce over five years. If you're getting married in a house of worship, then you might already have faith-based marriage classes booked in your schedule, since some churches and synagogues mandate them. And if you're not among the engaged couples required to get counseling, then you may be curious about whether or not it's worth taking the plunge. Here, get a comprehensive look at how a licensed counselor can help you build a solid foundation for your future together. Also, find out what you should discuss with your future spouse before walking down the aisle.

The Benefits of Marriage Counseling

Create positive marriage resolutions. It's easy to get emotional when discussing heavy-duty topics like money, sex, and kids. An experienced counselor can help guide the conversation and prevent you and your partner from going

off on a tangent, thereby losing focus and not accomplishing anything.

Learning (or improving) conflict resolution skills. If you've had some major tiffs or blow-outs in the past (and who hasn't) then you both know how you tend to react during arguments, whether it's wielding the silent treatment and pouting or yelling and name-calling. If you're both being honest with yourself, then there's probably room for improvement. A counselor will teach you how to listen and communicate more effectively; more specifically, they'll also direct you as how to state things in order to reach a happy solution.

Getting realistic expectations about timing. For example, if you come to an agreement that the kids topic is off the table for two years, then you won't be left anxious or frustrated when you want to delve into that plan and your partner isn't ready. This also applies to major purchases like buying a house.

Avoiding toxic resentments. Clear the air about resentments you've been hanging onto throughout your relationship. A counselor will help you resolve these issues and free yourselves from them so that they don't cause mas-

sive damage later on in your marriage.

Dismantling fears about marriage. One or both of you might come from a divorced family, or from a dysfunctional background where fighting and manipulation was the norm. Premarital counseling can teach you how to make peace with your past and break the cycle.

Identifying the "seeds" of future marital stress. With an experienced outsider's perspective, you can learn which behaviors and habits you need to adjust or quit cold turkey.

Address any Concerns You Might Have

Fear of unearthing additional problems. It can be unnerving to begin the process of premarital counseling because you and/or your partner might worry that examining your relationship under a microscope can lead to more stress and issues. In fact, although this can be hurtful in the short term, it can be very helpful in the long run.

Be humbled. It's neither easy nor fun to learn that you have less-than-stellar communication skills or find out that your partner isn't happy with your sex life. Even something as simple as hearing that he/she would like more decompression time when they get



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home from work can make you feel scolded, so you need to be prepared for some tough truths. It's important for you and your future spouse to remove your egos from the equation and allow yourselves to be open to constructive criticism, with the knowledge that in the process, you'll become a better spouse. **Remember this: As challenging as premarital counseling can be, it's all for the best and you're putting in the effort that's**

required to make your marriage work.

How to Make the Most Out of Your Sessions

Accept that it's going to be challenging at times. It's a mistake to think marriage counseling is just a scheduling session for when you'll have kids, or buy a house, or move to an island when you retire.

Remember that the goal is not to "win." Both partners need to keep an open mind

and be willing to change things that aren't working.

Keep sessions completely private. Don't chat with bridesmaids, your buddies, your mother, or anyone else about the things you've discussed, and don't even think about posting anything on Facebook that could embarrass your partner or yourself.

Trust is essential to improving upon any relationship and 100% discretion is necessary.

Express gratitude to your partner. Tell your future spouse that you're thankful that they're willing to attend counseling with you and for the great work you're doing together.

Source: Sharon Naylor for *Bridal Guide*, February 2014

Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre offers three premarital counseling packages for those seeking input prior to their wedding nuptials. Call for more information.

30 Days, 30 Ways to De-Clutter Your Home

Make a Date with Your Clutter. Most people never get around to clearing the clutter because their schedule is packed. So, just as you would schedule a regular checkup with your doctor, schedule an appointment with your home to begin organizing. Take two hours one morning and set that time aside to start getting things in order.

Pick a Target. Look around your home and decide what overwhelms you the most. What frustrates you most often? Pick the area that is most maddening and start there. Don't go anywhere else while you are working on that space.

Visualize the End Result. When most people decide to get organized, their impulse is to head to the store and buy containers. But that is putting the cart before the horse. The first thing you need to do is to think about your goal. What would you like your space to look like? What function would you like it to serve? Taking action to tackle your chaos is easier when you know where you're headed. So hold

off on the containers for now and work on your vision. Besides, later on when you figure out what containers you need, chances are you already have something in your house that could be repurposed.

Shed Surplus. Go through your target space and remove everything that doesn't fit with your current needs, goals, and lifestyle. Don't keep things that might be useful *someday*—only things that are useful to you today. Be honest with yourself. Do you use this item? Do you need it? Or do you love it? Those are the only three reasons to keep something. Just because somebody else decides to give you something—including mail—doesn't mean you have to keep it. If you are keeping it out of loyalty, you are doing yourself a disservice and a disservice to the person who gave it to you by not using it, so give it to someone who will.

Keep Three Containers Handy. As you work to remove the things you no longer need or want, keep three containers beside you: a laundry basket, a bag for donations,

and a garbage/recycle bag. Put things that belong elsewhere in the house into the laundry basket. Donate as much as you can to charities and recycle or trash the rest.

Gather like Things Together. If you don't know where to start, work from left to right in the room, or from top to bottom, sorting things as you go. So, gather all pens and pencils together, pile up all of your pairs of pants together, or place all of your cereals in a group. Don't stop to worry about whether you will keep an item or where you will put it. This will only slow down the process and overwhelm you.

Examine Your Groups. Now that all of your similar things are in one pile, you can make decisions about them. Do you really need 20 pairs of black pants? Some people keep pants in so many different closets and drawers that they have no idea they have so many pairs. Seeing them all together can be eye-opening. Get rid of items that are not being used or that are broken. Then narrow each pile down

to your favorites. We wear 20 percent of our clothes 80 percent of the time. Which jeans do you actually wear? Which pens still work? Which items are you most likely to use? By the end of this winnowing, you can get a group of 20 items down to a few.

Create Themes for Your Spaces. Assign a specific theme to every area of your space. If you are working in your kitchen, dedicate one shelf to breakfast foods one to canned goods, one to grains, and pastas, and one to baking supplies, etc. Make sure that items are at a sensible height so that whoever spends the most time in the kitchen can read the labels.

Maximize Your Space. Brainstorm various ways you can make the most of your space. Many kitchens and pantries have adjustable shelving. If the family cook cannot reach the pasta shelf, make it lower. If your pantry shelves are fixed, buy some stackers. These are fiberboard shelves (easy to find at Bed, Bath & Beyond, the Container Store, or Kmart) that can give you more space. Canned goods tend to be short, for example, and so you can create two layers of them with an additional shelf. Things that are used most often should get the



De-Clutter (Continued)

prime real estate—the countertop or the lower shelves. If you are working on your closets, you can also add shelves.

Get Things Off the Floor.

Whenever possible, keep things off the floor. This makes them easier to see and keeps the floor free of chaos. This is especially useful in the garage or the garden shed, where you can hang rakes, garden implements, tools, shovels, sleds, and other things, making them much easier to find.

Cure Your “Flat Surface Disease”. Many people are visual thinkers and like to have all of their things out where they can see them. The end result: their tables, desks, and countertops are covered with stacks of paperwork and other items. After you’ve divided all of the countertop clutter into piles of like things, find homes for all of them. If piles of mail are a problem, find a container to put them in. When that container is full, schedule time to sit down and go through it, throwing away as much as you can.

Make Rainbows in Your Closet. When organizing your closet, hang all of your dresses together, with the lightest-colored ones on the left progressing to the darkest colored dresses on the right. Do the same with your pants, blouses, skirts, and jackets. When you arrange them by color within their category, it is easy to see where the pants end and the blouses begin.

Light Up Your Space. The rooms where people pile up the most junk tend to be poorly lit. Dim lighting makes a room uninviting and a good

dumping ground. Warm overhead lighting can make a room much more welcoming to people and hostile to junk.

Store Items Near Where You Will Use Them.

In the kitchen, keep the things you use every day on lower shelves that are easily accessible. Store items you use less frequently in the higher shelves or elsewhere. For example, if you only use your turkey roasting pan once a year, don’t give it prime real estate in the kitchen. And if you don’t drink coffee, don’t let a big coffemaker take up room on your counter, just because guests might drop by someday. Forget about someday—focus on now.

Label Everything. Labeling shelves and other areas decreases the amount of time you spend looking for things. Labeling also communicates to the entire family where something belongs. In your kitchen, make labels for the canned goods, pasta, and breakfast cereal areas. In the kids’ rooms, make labels with pictures on them to help them keep their toys organized.

Repurpose Your Linen Closet. Store towels in the bathroom, where they will be used. Also, store sheets in the rooms in which they will be used. Now you have closet space to use for storage for

things like sleeping bags, or suitcases.

Involve Your Family. Reorganizing the house won’t work unless everyone in the family buys into the plan. People won’t change unless they want to, so you need to convince everyone that their lives will be better without clutter. Have your family help you create themed spaces for things and make labels. Involve them in every way you can, so they can help maintain order.

Keep Waste Baskets Handy. Make sure that every room has a waste basket. A lot of clutter piles up because people are often too lazy to carry something into another room to throw it out.

Shed Seasonally. Go through your wardrobe at the end of every season. Weed out clothing that you didn’t wear or didn’t love. Make notes of things you need for the next season.

Unsubscribe. Unsubscribe from all magazines and newsletters that you don’t read or that do not pertain to your current life.

Check Expiration Dates. One fast way to get rid of clutter in the bathroom is to check the expiration dates of your medicine and cosmetics. Toss anything that is out of date. Do the same thing in your kitchen, and you’ll suddenly find you have more room.

Use Baskets in the Bathroom.

Sort like things together (makeup, toiletries). Then look at each group and pick the one you are currently using. Store the rest in small baskets in a cabinet. This is better than keeping things loose all over the countertop, since they are less likely to fall and the basket can be easily lifted for cleaning.

Don’t Let Catalogues and Magazines Linger. When the new catalog or magazine issue arrives, toss out the old one. When your new phone bill arrives, shred the old one.

Don’t Hoard Hotel Shampoos. Once home, they have a habit of sticking around. Free yourself by donating them to homeless or battered women’s shelters. These places really need them.

Recycle Junk Mail As Soon As You Get It. Toss all unwanted mail into a recycle bin.

Keep a Current File Drawer. Create a drawer that is just for things going on this year. At the end of the year, clear out this drawer.

Never Leave a Room Empty Handed. Every time you leave a room, pick up something to throw away or to put away in the room you are headed. Stack things at the bottom of the stairs and take them with you when you go.

Treat Household Items Like Groceries. Make sure that everything you carry home with you gets put away promptly, like groceries.

Use Clear Bins. When storing things in your basement or attic, use see through bins so that it will be easy to tell what’s inside.

Source: Jennifer Steil on Jan. 20, 2013. www.ivillage.com





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Questions Your Child Wants to Answer

You probably ask your kids questions every day. What do you want for supper? Have you cleaned your room yet? Do you have any homework? These kind of questions require short and to the point answers. So you know your son wants macaroni and cheese for supper, but do you know how he feels about the world? Make an effort to ask your kids the big questions and start in-depth discussions about what matters to them. Not sure where to start? Here are 15 questions from *Propellers: Quick Questions to Launch Good Conversations* to get the ball rolling:

1. Who is your hero? What makes that person your hero?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to decide whether or not to stand up for what you believe in? What did you do?
3. Have you made any specific plans for your future? What does your future look like?
4. What actions are you taking now to make the world a better place in the future?
5. What is the nicest compliment you ever received from an adult?
6. Do you think our community is a good place to grow up in? If so, describe what makes it a good place. If not, what would make it better?
7. What are the worst problems in the world today that you wish you could do something about?
8. What do you think adults misunderstand about young people? How could you help them to understand better?
9. In your opinion, how important is it to dream and set goals? Why?
10. What is the trait you like most about each member of our family?
11. At this point in your life, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment?
12. What is the most pressing issue at your school right now? How would you address it?
13. How do you feel when someone pushes you to do your best?
14. If you could describe your ideal day, what would it be like?
15. What does it take to be a leader? Do you think you are a leader? Who do you think is a good leader?

Source: issuu.com/search-institute/docs/propellers-peek