

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Before You Say "I Do"

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When the love bug strikes and two individuals begin to plan their lives together, what kind of questions do they ask? *"What month do we want to get married in? Who should be invited to the wedding? What colors are we going to use? What kind of food do we want to serve?"* The list goes on with details that will help make this day a very special memory for years to come.

But, sometimes the planning for the wedding overshadows the preparation for the marriage and important issues get ignored. *"How do we manage conflict? Who is going to handle the money? How will the roles and responsibilities be divided? Where are we going to spend the holidays?"* These are all questions that should be considered and discussed with your partner at some time during the courtship and before you both commit to marriage.

Forming a Lasting Marriage

What can be done to help individuals form a lasting and fulfilling marriage? There is a multitude of advice and opinions from television and radio talk show hosts, magazine articles and, of course, our peers. But a solid body of current research focuses on the time period before couples say, "I do." Dr. Jeffrey H. Larson is a researcher and author who has devised a scientific method for increasing your chances for success. His book, *Should We Stay Together?*, is a wonderful resource for any couple considering mar-

riage. Dr. Larson identifies more than two dozen specifics that contribute to marital satisfaction and helps readers evaluate the relationship's assets and liabilities. He debunks some common myths such as "love is enough," "living together will prepare us for marriage," and "you're my one and only."

As a marriage and family therapist for more than twenty years, Dr. Larson has observed that many couples in marital therapy trace their current marriage problems back to the pre-marital relationship. This makes it all the more important that couples planning to marry take the time to better prepare themselves for a lifetime of togetherness.

Questions to Ask

Below are a few thoughts for you and your partner to consider and discuss before committing to marriage. Answer the following questions for yourself using as much time as necessary to consider each issue fully and making notes of your responses and reactions. Also, share the exercise with your partner and allow him or her to consider it privately. Afterwards, schedule a time and place to discuss your responses in an environment that is free from distractions and stress.

- Why am I getting married? Why am I choosing to share my life, my resources, and my dreams with this person? What has brought

me to this point in my life? Why is this the time?

- Do my parents, friends, peers, or co-workers support my choice or are they concerned for my welfare? How do I feel about their apprehension? Have I really made a good choice for me or have I compromised my values because I hope things will get better?
- What does commitment mean to me? Do I have a role model to follow who helps me see how to navigate through the tough times? What changes do I expect to see after the wedding?
- How do I handle conflict? Am I willing to face the situation and discuss options, or do I ignore the facts and hope they will go away? Can I talk about my anger or disappointment with my partner and can we reach a compromise? Can we come to an agreement about how to deal with our problems—a way to communicate that does not include violence, put-downs, or walking away without resolving the issues?
- What are the common goals and dreams we want to achieve? Where will we live? How many children do we want? Who will clean the toilet and take out the trash? Who will handle the money? How many credit cards will we have? How much money will we save from each paycheck? What color will the bedroom be? Where will we spend the holidays?
- What kind of marriage relationship do I want?

How happy am I in this relationship? Who is responsible for my happiness? How much fun do we have on our dates? Do I have fond memories of our courtship?

Take Your Time

Every person and every relationship is different. Slow down and take time to think through these and other issues you may not have considered. Give yourselves the gift of time and the reassurance that you are the right person for this commitment. If the above questions raised concerns or issues that you and your partner haven't discussed or thought about, maybe the relationship needs more time before you say "I do."

References

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