

Premarital Counseling:

Plan For Your Marriage As You Are Planning Your Wedding

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Bridal fairs, wedding announcements, floral arrangements, mobile music DJs, interviewing caterers - so many things to do to get ready for a wedding. With all the attention to the details to the wedding itself, don't forget to plan for the marriage.

There are a number of options for pre-marriage counseling or marriage education on the internet, through churches, professional counselors, and community initiatives, like Oklahoma Marriage Initiative's (OMI) PREP workshop. In Oklahoma, couples participating in premarital counseling with a Licensed Marriage/Family Therapist and other marriage education programs such as OMI sponsored workshops are eligible for a marriage license discount.

Almost all couples enter into marriage with the belief that they have enough love to allow their marriage to be that one in two that survives rather than ending in divorce. Yet many of these couples believe that "love is enough" to accomplish this. Marriage is work and it takes skills. Yet, chances are, that you have never received any training to be a husband or a wife, except from watching your own parents. And for some couples, this might mean good training. For many others, this kind of training was not so good. Believing that you know what your parents did wrong and planning to do the opposite is not necessarily a good plan either.

Marriage education and/or pre marriage counseling can yield many benefits-even ones that you couldn't guess.

You have a structured format to identify potential problem areas that you may have never even thought about discussing. You may be assuming that you are already on the same page. (Not a good assumption to make).

You have guidance in identifying potential problem areas and opening up the lines of discussion. You then have help in dealing with those problem areas before they become actual problems.

You have an opportunity to clarify your values, identify some goals and develop a joint vision for your life together.

You can develop enough awareness to be able to continue to identify hidden challenges that could sabotage that vision. The skills you learn can help you keep your vision from being derailed.

You learn such skills as communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving. You can acquire the skill necessary to communicate effectively about money issues and learn how to budget and manage money together. You have an opportunity to identify your hidden and perhaps, unrealistic expectations, and eliminate those before they cause too much damage. You can learn how to help each other manage stress and learn to

balance conflicting demands between work, home, and individual needs. You will have an opportunity to identify and understand how your own family history and that of your beloved's can create potential pitfalls, and yet, create opportunities for growth in your own relationship.

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"Marital education" and "pre-marriage counseling" are often used synonymously. Marital education may be conducted in a formal group or classroom type setting, or individually by a minister or counselor. It might have all the characteristics of a "class". Pre-marriage counseling usually entails marital education, but adds a therapeutic component where couples are able, with professional assistance, to work through existing problems and issues. Whichever route you choose, marital education and/or pre-marriage counseling is worth the time, energy, and money, to help insure the success and longevity of your marriage. Your wedding will only last a few minutes or a few hours. Hopefully, with deliberate attention, planning, and effort, your marriage will last a lifetime.

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