

What Is Premarital Counseling All About? Questions And Worksheets.

(Originally from my blog on the 20/05/2019)

Premarital counseling is a form of therapy that allows a couple to explore many issues to help them build a stronger and healthier relationship prior to marriage or partnership.

It can help you identify any weakness that could become problematic later in the marriage.

This type of counseling is run by therapist who have extensive training (postgraduate) in relationship and marriage counseling.

Research is showing us that having premarital counseling does give a marriage a 30% better chance of success, as couples find they use [more effective ways to communicate](#) and have a closer partnership as result of the counseling.

Why would you decide to have premarital counseling?

In some cases it is a requirement prior to marriage, but sometimes a couple might decide to use this type of counseling to discuss topics related to their relationship prior to making a larger commitment to each other.

This doesn't necessarily mean they are entering into a legal marriage but have decided to commit to one another, move in together, and perhaps start a family. Other times either of the partners may have been married before and are now deciding to do so again, so they feel this form of counseling will give their new relationship a better start.

The topics covered include: sex, how you will deal with disagreements, work/stay at home parenting, finances, religious views, desire to have children, family and friend relationships, beliefs and values, individuals roles in relationship, how to communicate better, etc.

Premarital counseling has a great benefit in that it helps the couple to [communicate better](#), set their realistic expectations for the marriage, or relationship, and helps them to develop better conflict resolution skills.

It helps them to understand that they bring their own childhood experiences, values, beliefs systems and personal history into the relationships and this may clash with their partner's experiences etc. It also shows them how this may impact upon their relationship, how it doesn't always match with their new partner and how to resolve these differences.

Many difficulties, particularly within the first few years of adjusting, can be helped or resolved prior to marriage if couples take the time to plan their relationship as much as their wedding.

The benefits and challenges of premarital counseling.

Premarital counseling isn't about the counsellor telling the couple how to run your relationship. It isn't about compatibility tests either. If you find that the counsellor is doing these things then stop seeing them as they are not properly trained.

Some couples really are opposite attracts and even though they disagree on something, they can resolve their differences to the benefit of their relationship and family.

Benefits include:

- It builds [effective communication](#) between the couple.
- Provides neutral ground to discuss issues and topics related to relationship.
- It helps couple plan for the future.
- It will help individuals discover new things about themselves and their partner.

Challenges include:

- It may cause anxiety in one partner. This is usually caused because they do not know what to expect from the process or they are uncomfortable discussing things with a stranger. A good therapist will allay these fears.
- Some couples (or individuals) may not like discussing their sex lives or money issues.
- Couples who have been together a while will have more ingrained issues, but a good therapist can help you work these through prior to marriage.
- Time may be a factor, trying to find the time both parties can be together for therapy may be problematic.
- The cost involved can be too high or doesn't fit into the budget with everything else that has to be bought for the wedding or new home.
- The availability of a suitable therapist in your area can be a problem, so you may have to travel.

It is important to factor in the cost of this counseling to your wedding budget. If you can arrange to have counseling earlier in the engagement is it better than just before the wedding.

As the closer you get to the big day the busier and more stressed you will both be. Don't skimp on counseling, find a suitably qualified therapist, you are investing in your future life together.

Also remember, that although pastoral counseling is great (if you are religious) but it is not premarital counseling, there is no harm in doing both.

Remember to keep an open mind and be willing to discuss harder topics.

Some topics that can be discussed

The topics that can be discussed in premarital counseling are long and varied, I've only listed some of the main ones here.

I've also listed some types of questions that can be explored by couples during premarital counseling. (You can also use these questions at any time in a relationship or if you are in a relationship that you feel is about to take the next step forward)

These worksheets are not a substitute for therapy itself.

Handling conflict and how to communicate

Discussions about conflict may not be the thing on a couples mind, particularly in the honeymoon phase of any relationship. But how we [communicate](#) and handle conflict is extremely important and a good indicator of how successful the marriage will be. Understanding and knowing how your partner handles conflicts, disagreements, is important when planning your future together. (See the handout on [improving your communications skills in relationships plus worksheets](#))

1. How do you handle conflict, do you aim to resolve it there and then or do you hold grudges and let these seethe inside you?

2. Do you like to wait till the other person has calmed down a little before discussing it through?

3. Do you stick your head in the sand and hope it resolves itself?

4. Do you shout, throw things?

5. Do you use the silent treatment?

6. Do you regret things you say in the heat of the moment?

7. How easy is it for you to apologize?

8. When will you ask for help from a therapist if things escalate?

9. How do you communicate your feelings, even outside of arguments?

Handling stress

Stress is a natural part of life and outside pressures can bring a lot of stress in to a marriage. There is a further stress management section in my book [The Building Blocks Of Self-Care](#).

1. How do you handle these stresses?

2. How does your partner handle stress?

3. Are these compatible with each other?

4. Or do you withdraw when you are stressed or feeling under pressure?

5. Are you able to communicate this to your partner?

6. How will this impact your relationship?

Handing family finances

This area is one of the biggest and most likely to cause difficulties in a relationship at any stage. Attitudes to debt, spending and differences in income all need to be explored.

Finding out your partner has a large debt, or likes to spend more than they earn after you are married is not a good way to start off. It is also a highly sensitive topic for people and one they find hard to talk about, especially with strangers.

Being honest here is the only policy here and not just with another but with yourself also.

1. How do you like to spend your income?

2. How will you pay family bills together?

3. Who will be responsibility for what?

4. What happens if one of you loses your job?

5. Do you have a large debt, student loan, gambling issues?

6. Will you have one joint account or one account for household bills and then 2 separate accounts for personal spending?

7. What kind of lifestyle will you have?

8. Is any of that compatible with how your partner sees their lifestyle?

9. How did your parents handle money?

10. Do you have money blocks you need to work on?

These are just some questions to get you started, there are plenty more you need the answers. For more financial worksheets and questions please see my book [The Building Blocks Of Self-Care](#)

Family planning

1. Do you want children or not? How many?

2. Where will they live and go to school?

3. What if you can't have children?

4. Will you look at possible alternatives such as surrogacy, in vitro, or adopting or does this go against you personal or religious beliefs and values?

5. Will one parent become a stay-at-home parent?

6. How will children be disciplined?

Lots of questions and answered need to be explored here and some of the above is only the start.

Where you will live and other family decisions?

1. You need to explore how you will make decisions, together for the most part, but what happens if one partner isn't available?

2. Are there any topics that you both have to be there to decide together?

3. Where will you live? In a city, apartment or will you want a smaller town, village or country lifestyle?

4. What happens if one of you has to have the last say, this is a red flag issue and should be addressed before marriage?

5. How will you handle decisions where you both strongly disagree with each other?

You cannot account for every possible event but having a working guideline will help resolve decisions and arguments more quickly.

Attitudes to work/careers

Understanding your, and your partner's, attitude to work/careers is important.

1. Are they workaholics?

2. Are they ambitious, will this impact how much they will be involved with your or the family?

3. Will you have to move around a lot because of their work?

4. How do you feel about this?

5. Will you or your partner give up work if you have children?

6. What happens if either of you decide to switch jobs or career paths, go back to university?

7. What expectations do you have regarding support from your partner about your career?

8. How does work affect the amount of time you spend together? What if one of you loses their job?

9. What if one partner earns more than the other, what implications does this have on your relationship or would have if it started to happen?

Attitudes to Sex

Few couples spend time discussing their sex lives, their needs, wants, expectations, and desires in an open and honest way. This may lead to frustration, dissatisfaction with your partner. Sex plays a huge role in any relationship, it can be used as a weapon against the other partner or as a means of saying how upset or dissatisfied one partner is about another area of their relationship.

1. What are your sexual needs, wants and desires?

2. Are they compatible with your partners?

3. What if there is a large difference in here? How will you handle it?

4. What happens if one partner is ill or stressed, loses interest in sex?

5. How important is sex to your relationship?

6. How do you feel about pornography, open marriage, what sexual acts are off the table?

7. Do you both agree about these topics?

This might be uncomfortable for you both to discuss but being honest and open about this topic will have a huge impact on your relationship.

Beliefs and values (including religion)

These are the fundamentals of who you are and what you want, need, believe in life.

1. What are your core values and beliefs?

2. Are they the same as your partner?

3. Do you have the same religious beliefs?

4. Do you want your children to be brought up having specific values, beliefs, including religious ones?

5. Does your partner agree with this?

6. What are your [boundaries](#)?

7. What are [red flags](#) for you?

8. Are the same as your partners?

Family and friends

It is important to have a [support system](#) but it does need to be positive for both couples. There is nothing worse than a negative, nosy, bossy in-law or friend, telling you how you should run your marriage or your family.

1. How do you feel about your partner's family?

2. How close are they as a family?

3. Does this differ from your own family?

4. Do you mind if your partner discusses your marriage or family with their parents or close family/friends?

5. Are there friends or family member you don't like?

6. What happens if either parents become ill, who will look after them?

7. Is there any expectation that as they grow older parents will move in with you and your family?

8. What about previous partners and children?

9. Are you comfortable if your partner is still friends with an ex, still communicates (even if they have no children)?

10. What if you are becoming a step-parent to children from your partner's previous relationship?

11. Who disciplines the children, whose responsible for them?

These are questions best discussed prior to marriage.

Having personal space

Although marriage is a partnership you still need your personal space at times.

1. How do you want to spend this time?

2. Does your partner understand your need to have personal space?

3. How did your parents handle personal time, how was it modeled for you?

Understanding and respecting the other partners need for some personal time is important. Being able to communicate about this effectively is very important as it can cause problems in the relationship. Without this understanding one partner may feel smothered, lonely, rejected or resentful.

Based on the above questions and answers now try and answer the following questions.

1. What are your values as a couple/family?

2. What is your family mission statement?

3. What are your goals as a couple/family?

(Relationship/Family/Friends/Home/Finances/Travel/Spiritual/Career/Children/etc)

Break these up into 3 categories: 1 year, 5 year, 10 year.

4. What can _____ (fill in your partners name here) do to make you feel special?

5. Why you think _____ (fill in your partners name here) is special?