

Preparing for Marriage



Marriage is a joyful event but can also be a complicated intersection of two existing families and involves the creation of a new family.

How well it works can be affected by a range of things such as each person's world view, communication skills, attachment style, approach to managing stress, personality and childhood experiences of family.

Couples need to make decisions on how to love, how to manage arguments, how finances reflect their intimacy, whether to have children, what role religion will have, how much time they spend together and apart, and how to negotiate expectations and roles.

While these are important considerations for all couples, it's timely for couples planning to marry or commit to think and talk about these issues together.

Relationship Dynamics

Different factors can impact on the dynamics of your relationship together as a couple, such as how assertive or self-confident you and your partner are, and your capacity to address difficulties together as they arise.

It's important for both you and your partner to be able to listen to and influence each other, without one person always dominating or controlling the other person, or the relationship. One question you might ask yourself is, 'In general, do I feel able to express my needs in the relationship? Do I believe I will be listened to?'

Communication and Conflict Resolution

A fundamental part of a healthy relationship is being able to clearly and respectfully communicate with your partner and negotiate conflict together.

While many of us try to avoid conflict, it's very normal for couples to not always agree with each other. What's important when there is conflict, is that both people in the relationship have the opportunity to speak without interruption, and are listened to and have their feelings acknowledged. Make sure you both consider different solutions and ways to compromise. This can help you to interrupt the pattern of conflict, reach a resolution and get things back on track.

It's important to remember that conflict isn't always a bad thing – it's how you manage conflict that matters.

Personality

The ways you adapt to change, how social you are, whether you prioritise the needs of others over your own, and how emotionally steady you are can all impact on a marriage. It's important to know both yourself and your partner, and find ways to balance your similarities and differences. It's not uncommon to find that you each have different strengths to offer in different aspects of your relationship.

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Attachment Styles

We usually have a blueprint for how close or how distant we are in intimate relationships. Consider whether your relationships and future marriage form a secure base for you and your partner. In a healthy marriage, it's important to balance time together and time apart so that you and your partner continue to grow both as individuals and as a couple.

Family and Friends

As well as building a relationship with each other, it's likely that you and your partner will have other relationships with friends, colleagues and family members. Healthy relationships, both romantic or otherwise, require healthy boundaries.

Think about your relationship boundaries and what information you and your partner share with others.

How do you manage sensitive situations with people you care about? For example, if your parents want to visit more frequently than you or your partner would prefer? It's good to be clear about your own boundaries and have strategies in place for how to communicate these kindly but firmly to the people in your life.

Financial Intimacy

Although most people are familiar with the ideas of emotional and sexual intimacy, financial intimacy isn't as well-known. However, the relationship between you, your partner and your collective finances is also related to intimacy. How do you and your partner distinguish 'what's mine, what's yours and what's ours'? Consider how you communicate about money and how your money management reflects and impacts on the closeness in your relationship.

Marriage Expectations and Parenting Roles

It's a good idea to talk to your partner about your expectations around marriage, parenting and what your family unit could look like. Questions you might want to consider and discuss include:

- Will life decision-making be shared?
- Are both partners' careers viewed as equally important and valuable?
- Do you both want to have children? If so, how many children?
- What kind of parent do you want to be?
- What kind of parent do you expect your partner to be?
- How might parenting impact your relationship?

Having conversations about parenting and expectations of marriage helps to better plan for any differences and work through possible solutions before any potential problems emerge.

Living Together

While many people now live together before marriage, for some a wedding also signals the start of living together. While it's an exciting time of life, moving in together can be a challenge. It's where you and your partner really get to know each other, and sometimes it can be frustrating. Even the people we love the most have habits that we find challenging. Be aware of your own reactions and decide what you can accept and when you need to have a conversation or work for change. Think about your own contributions to situations and ask yourself if there are any things you could do differently.

Stress and Wellness

How well do you look after your physical and mental health? Do you have strategies to manage strong emotions like distress when they arise? Having ways to look after yourself and calm your mind and body when things get tough will help you to be more resilient and also strengthen your relationship with your partner.

Working Things Through

All relationships require work and investment. It's really normal for couples not to always agree on things – what's important is that you and your partner can talk about issues in a way where both people feel listened to, respected and acknowledged. It's also important that as a couple you have a space where you can explore your

differences. Some people choose to do this just as a couple, while others find it helpful to do so with the help of a qualified practitioner such as a couples' counsellor.

Some couples who are preparing to marry also choose to participate in a relationship education course.

About Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. For over 70 years, we have been supporting children, adults, families and communities.

As a federation of Relationships Australia organisations in each state and territory, we have over 118 service locations across the country, with our National Office based in Canberra.

We provide a broad range of services including counselling, family dispute resolution and mediation, family violence prevention, support and recovery services, and mental health services.

Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Relationships Australia receives funding from the Commonwealth Government, as well as state and territory governments, and other sources.

Next steps

For more information on our services and how they can support you, or to find your nearest centre:

Call 1300 364 277

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