

Before Saying “I Do”

As I continue to teach a state-mandated co-parenting class, *Focus on Kids*, to divorcing parents, I often leave the class feeling discouraged about relationships, concerned about childrens’ futures, and negative about society in general. So many parents are living in chaos and conflict, some are dealing with poor choices and others struggle to make sense of their lives. Most parents attending the classes agree, they didn’t ever expect to be getting a divorce.

Research shows that unmarried men and women expect that they will have life-long marriages. However, today's dating culture can make it difficult for singles to achieve that goal. In particular, studies show women are more pessimistic and less confident than men about finding the right marriage partner.

Don’t rush to get married. Of course, many of my *Focus on Kids* participants quickly shake their heads saying they’ll never marry again. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 59 percent of first marriages between couples who are 18 years old or younger end in divorce within the first 15 years, compare to 35 percent of those couples who marry at age 25 or older. If you think you have found the right person for you, there is no need to rush. It is very important to get to know each other well before saying “I do.”

Check out these questions to help you and your partner consider and discuss marriage:

Why am I getting married?

- Why am I choosing to share my life with this person?
- Is this the right time? What has brought me to this point in my life?
- Are there concerns or support for my welfare from my parents, friends and coworkers? How do I feel about their apprehension?
- Is this a good choice for me? Have I compromised my values and beliefs because I think things will be better if I’m married?
- What is my level of commitment? What changes do I expect to experience after the wedding?
- Will I be able to discuss problems and options with my partner? How do we manage conflict together?
- Will we communicate openly to reach a compromise or agreement without involving violence or put-downs?

- What are our future goals and dreams? How many children do we want? How will the roles and responsibilities be divided?
- How much money will we save each month? Who will handle our money?
- What kind of marriage relationship do I want? How happy am I in this relationship?

You and your partner should take time to slow down. Think through and discuss these questions and issues that you may not have considered during your courtship. It's important to take the time to prepare for a lifetime of togetherness. I don't want to see you in my Focus on Kids classes.