

# Marriage Matters!

a guide for louisiana couples



## **MARRIAGE 101**

Preserving Your Positive Bond

Managing Conflicts

Protecting Your Commitment

## **DOLLARS & SENSE**

Give Your Paycheck  
a Boost!

## **QUIZ:**

What are the three  
most important words?

## **POP QUIZ!**

How well do we  
know each other?

## **TOP 10**

Reasons to create  
a good marriage

Marriage Matters!  
a guide for louisiana couples

Office of Family Support, Department of  
Social Services, Baton Rouge, LA 2003



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was produced under a contract between the Louisiana Department of Social Services and Public Strategies, Inc., of Oklahoma City, OK. (Contract No. CFMS # 590457).

The project was directed by  
Theodora Ooms, senior consultant.

The co-authors were:  
Paul Amato, Department of Sociology,  
Pennsylvania State University, PA  
Barbara Markey, Center for Marriage and Family,  
Creighton University, NE  
Scott Stanley, Center for Marital and Family  
Studies, Denver University, CO  
Theodora Ooms, and Katherine Spaht,  
School of Law, Louisiana State University, LA

National advisors (in addition to  
the co-authors):  
George Doub, Family Wellness Associates,  
Scotts Valley, CA  
Mark Eastburg, Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids,  
Kent County, MI  
Joe Jones, Center for Fathers, Families and  
Workforce Development, Baltimore, MD  
Diane Sollee, Coalition for Marriage, Family and  
Couples Education, Washington, DC  
George Young, Holy Temple Baptist Church,  
Oklahoma City, OK.

In addition we are grateful to John Hutchins and  
Anne Milneck for skillful editing and for the advice  
and assistance of the Louisiana Commission  
on Marriage and the Family and the following  
individuals in Louisiana:  
Midge Denton, Catholic Community Services,  
Representative Sharon Weston-Broome,  
Carolyn Caldwell, Madison Parish Clerk of Court,  
Mernie Carter, Coalition Against Domestic Violence,  
Dana Gillett, LSU Agricultural Center/  
Cooperative Extension,  
Marjorie Harper, Bossier Parish Community College,  
John Hogue, Consultant,  
Carla Roberts, Office of Senator Cain,  
Diane Sasser, LSU Agricultural Center/  
Cooperative Extension,  
Katherine Spaht, LSU Law School

This guide draws upon the work of many scholars  
and practitioners in the field of couples and  
marriage education and research. In particular  
we want to acknowledge our debt to the PREP  
team led by Scott Stanley and Howard Markman  
for many of the core themes on pages 17-19, and  
the adaptation of the Speaker/Listener Technique  
on page 18; and to John Gottman and Andrew  
Christensen for their research leading to the  
concept of "pursuer and distancer" ( p.18 ).

This publication was designed by Erica Brewer at  
Digital FX, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

# Marriage Matters!

Marriages come in all shapes and sizes. You may be young, middle aged or a senior. This may be your first marriage or your second or third. You may have children or you may be gaining a step-child. You may get married in a home, a church, synagogue, mosque, or courthouse. While no two marriages may look alike, Louisiana believes you've made a great decision.

“..so, from the State of Louisiana  
“Congratulations!”  
Congratulations

You've made another good decision by reading this guide, that's because Louisiana believes...Marriage Matters!

Like everyone who marries, you want your marriage to be successful, happy and long lasting. You want to be friends, lovers and partners for life. You have a vision of taking care of each other as you grow older and being there for each other through life's ups and downs.

Reading this guide can help you as you plan your marriage. Experts from Louisiana and around the country have created this guide to answer questions and provide information for making your marriage the success you want it to be.

## Read...

this guide and discuss it with your partner. Try out some of the tips in the weeks, months and years ahead.

## Save...

this guide and look at it from time to time, especially when questions or problems come up in your relationship.

## Check out...

the publications and websites suggested on page 35. They can provide additional information about topics in this guide.

## Participate...

in premarital preparation before you marry. These programs teach valuable tips, skills and attitudes that form the foundation for good relationships. Couples usually find these programs very helpful—and men report they enjoy them as much as women do.

## Seek out...

help for your marriage if you sense serious trouble. Not all marriages can or should be saved, but many can be. Don't wait until it's too late to get help.

This public document was published at a total cost of \$20,666.12. 23,500 copies of this public document were published in this first printing at a cost of \$20,666.12. The total cost of all printings of this document is \$20,666.12. This document was published for the Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, P.O. Box 94065, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9065 by LSU Graphic Services, under special exception by the Division of Administration to provide information to the public concerning the assistance programs administered by the Office of Family Support. This material was printed in accordance with standards for printing by state agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43:31.

# Table of Contents...



**POP QUIZ!**  
How Well Do  
We Know  
Each Other?

**Why Marry?**  
**Top 10**  
Reasons to Create  
a Good Marriage

**Marriage 101**  
Managing Conflicts  
**QUIZ:**  
What Are the Three Most  
Important Words?  
Learn the Speaker-Listener  
Technique

**Transitions, Crisis,  
and Rough Spots:**  
How To Cope  
What to do if  
Our Marriage is  
in Big Trouble?

**5**

**15**

**17**

**31**

**6** **Beyond the Contract:**  
Is Marriage More than a Piece of Paper?

**16** **Dollars & Sense of Marriage**  
Give Your Paycheck a Boost!

**7** **The Myth of Happily Ever After**

- Dealing with Realistic—and Unrealistic—Expectations
- What are We Arguing About? Top Tiff Topics
- Blending Families: Did I Marry ALL these People?
- Time Apart May Be Time Well Spent

**21** **Raising Kids—and Stepkids—Successfully**

- Find Effective Ways to Parent Together
- Tips for Stepfamilies

**27** **Living Together or Married:**  
Your Legal Rights and Obligations  
Side by Side Comparison

**35** **Marriage Resources**

# Pop Quiz!

## How Well Do We Know Each Other?

Grab a pen and your partner...it's quiz time! As you read the questions, both of you write down your answers. Oh, and cheating is allowed. When your partner doesn't know an answer, help out! You'll learn more about each other that way.

### About Our Families...

1. How many people are in my partner's family? Name them.
2. Who does he/she feel closest to?
3. How does my partner's family show affection?
4. How do they celebrate birthdays?
5. How do they deal with conflict? Do they argue a lot?
6. Is religion important to my partner's family? Do they go to religious services regularly, only on special occasions, or not at all?

### Bonus Questions...

Earn extra credit with your partner by answering the following questions and talking honestly about them.

1. How well does my partner listen to me?
2. How does my partner communicate his/her feelings?
3. How does my partner handle it when we disagree?
4. Do we generally agree on how to spend our time together?
5. Do we generally agree about sex and the importance of being faithful?
6. Does my partner want to have children?
7. Does my partner think we both should work after we're married? After we have a child?
8. Are our attitudes about money decisions similar or different?

### About us...

1. What's my partner's favorite food?
2. Who's my partner's best friend?
3. What's my partner's favorite music?
4. What would my partner choose to do if he/she had a totally free day?
5. What does my partner like most about me? Least about me?
6. How does my partner express love and affection for me?
7. How important is religion and church attendance to my partner?
8. What are my partner's ideas about how married couples should divide up the tasks in the home?

# BEYOND

## the contract

marriage is more than a piece of paper

**M**arriage is much more than a simple contract. Like the ring you wear on your left hand, marriage is a signal to society that you are linked personally, legally, socially, economically and spiritually. You are making a public commitment when you marry.

Marriage is a special legal status; the law will treat a couple differently once they marry. Generally, married couples receive more financial benefits and legal protections than unmarried couples, and they also have obligations to support each other. (See “Living Together or Married” p.29)

State law sets the rules under which people can marry, separate or divorce. These laws are in place in an attempt to encourage and foster the commitment spouses make to each other and to any children they may have.

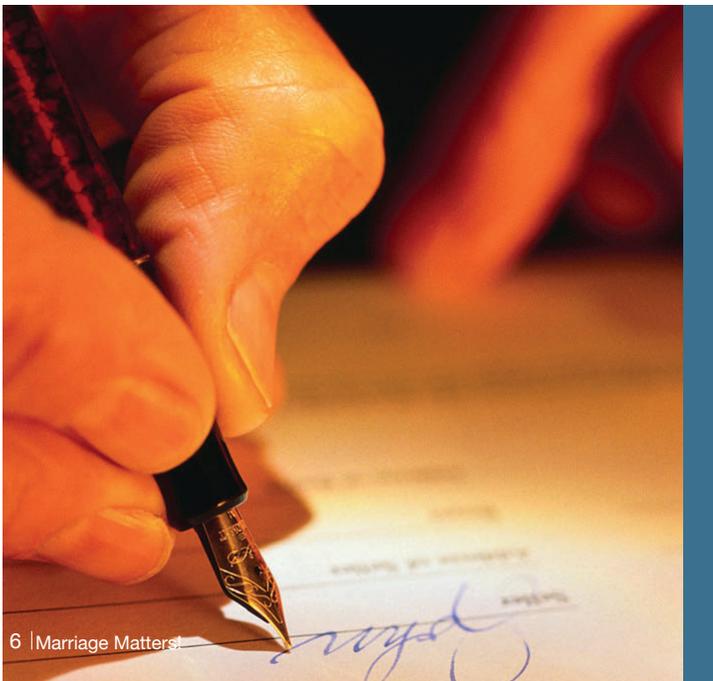
There are legal rights, responsibilities, privileges, benefits, and protections associated with marriage. Because of this, marriage requires a celebrant—a Justice of the Peace, pastor or minister, for example—who acts as an “officer of the state” in marrying you. The law also requires two witnesses to the ceremony. In many ceremonies, the official may ask the witnesses—and sometimes the whole congregation—to help support and sustain the couple’s marriage in the years to come.

### **Covenant Marriage Contract**

In Louisiana, couples choose from two types of legal marriage: Regular and Covenant. If you choose “Covenant Marriage,” you are required to get pre-marital counseling and to sign a document called a Declaration of Intent. There are other important differences in a Covenant Marriage, including differences in divorce procedures. (Your Clerk of Court’s office has detailed information on Covenant Marriage.)

### **Community Property**

Louisiana treats marriage like a financial partnership. For example, income earned by each spouse during marriage is community property, owned equally by each spouse. You can choose to make a different property agreement that will separate each partner’s ownership (Your Clerk of Court’s office has information explaining Community Property).



Marriage isn't always the "happily-ever-after" story we know from fairy tales and movies. When the honeymoon fades, you can expect to shift from being "in love" with one another to "learning to love one another." Denise and Mitch's experience is typical.

*When they first married, Denise thought her new husband Mitch was wonderful. He brought out the best in her and made her feel special. She even thought his little faults were cute. In their second year together, Mitch lied about something. On top of that, his little faults and cute mannerisms were now driving Denise nuts. She began making sarcastic comments. She felt lonely around him. It seemed as if he didn't understand her.*

*Denise finally told Mitch how she felt. He heard her and seemed to understand. He apologized and explained that he didn't realize he upset her. While they talked, Denise realized there were things she did and said that bothered Mitch as well. They realized that neither person is perfect, but they forgave and moved on.*

*In the future, when they have trouble spots, they work hard at being open and honest. Denise finds the relationship is deeper and better than before.*

The only way to avoid all conflict is to avoid all closeness. On a daily basis, couples negotiate who does what and when. Something as trivial as how to fill the dishwasher or as ordinary as who picks up the kids can spark arguments. Before you married, maybe you didn't notice the ways your partner differs from you. Maybe those differences didn't seem to matter much then—you may have even been attracted to them! Here's what happened to Brandon after he had been married a couple of years.

*Brandon was finding it more and more difficult to live with his wife Alicia. He decided to talk to a counselor provided by his job. When asked what bothered him most, Brandon told his counselor, "I'm organized and she's totally unpredictable. You never know what she's going to do next. Sometimes, she comes up with off-the-wall solutions to problems, and it embarrasses me."*

*The counselor asked what made Brandon fall in love with Alicia in the first place. Brandon thought for a moment, smiled and said, "Well, I think it was because she was always so spontaneous and creative, and I thought I needed that in my life."*

No two people are exactly alike; every couple has differences. The differences are not the problem. How you view your differences and handle conflict is what's important. See Marriage 101 on page 17-19 for more information.

# THE MYTH OF *Happily Ever After*

*Arguments are a normal part of healthy marriages. When you are up close and personal, sharing life with someone on a regular basis, there will be friction.*

# Young

## YOUNG Love

THE EARLY YEARS OF MARRIAGE CAN HOLD SPECIAL CHALLENGES

Studies show that time, sex and money are the top challenges for couples in their first few years of marriage. A newly-married woman said to us, “I’m so tired with work, taking care of the baby and housework, I don’t know how—or when—I’m supposed to be a wife.” Here are some tips for the first few years.

### Differences—Learn to Expect and Accept Them

Your partner is different from you, and it’s important to learn to accept his or her differences.

### Conflict Happens

Expect to have conflicts, and learn to start over and forgive.

### Pick Your Battles

Picking a fight when you’re frustrated or tired is a recipe for disaster...set a time to discuss the issue when both parties are in a good frame of mind.



### Surround Yourself

Spend time as a couple with friends and groups who support building a good marriage.

### Your Attention Please!

Most important, remember that a good marriage takes attention and work.

### Accentuate the Positives

Consider the positive aspects of your relationship—time together, affection and sex! Nourish the positives by making special time for them.



# Love

# Remarriage: WHY THIS IS A DIFFERENT MARRIAGE

## MARRYING FOR THE SECOND OR THIRD TIME

Experts urge couples entering a remarriage to remember: This marriage is different. Consider these three important areas:

### CLEAN THE SLATE

If you had a good first marriage, and your spouse died, don't try to recapture exactly the same thing. If your first marriage wasn't so great and ended in divorce, don't be over-fearful that your new spouse will be like your old spouse. Start this marriage with a new style of being married.

### MINE, YOURS...NOW OURS?

Avoid the traps of misunderstandings or conflict over what is "my stuff" and what is "your stuff" (homes, belongings, money). Discuss your expectations about the "things" you bring into this marriage. Decide together what will be "our stuff" and "our space."

### STEPPARENT PREP

Learn about the challenges of stepparenting *before* your marriage. Find books or other information on the topic. Talk with other stepparents. Community centers or places of worship in your community may offer courses on stepparenting. See tips for stepparents on page 26.

## Erase Old Tapes

In stressful situations, people often fall into their earliest learned behaviors—things they learned in their families, neighborhoods, or early relationships. Recognize that you may be "repeating" or "reacting" rather than choosing how to respond. This can happen when dealing with issues like:

- How to fight
- How to deal with money
- How to handle anger, hurt, fear
- What women should do and what men should do
- How people should treat me when I'm sick.



*Suzie's family saved money and paid "up front" for everything; they never got into debt. Charlie's family sometimes incurred debt so that the family could enjoy things when they desired them rather than waiting. So, Suzie argues, "If you loved me, you would save." And Charlie responds, "If you loved me, you would spend."*

Sometimes the childhood message may be so unpleasant that the partner does the opposite.

*Theresa's family often shouted, and she hated it. When her husband Harry raises his voice, Theresa withdraws and will not communicate with him. As a result, they never work out their conflicts in a healthy way.*

Get in touch with the messages from your childhood. Then make a choice: Will you repeat or react against them or will you do something else entirely? If those relationships were destructive and hurtful, you will have to work harder to avoid repeating the patterns in your own marriage.

# Connection

## MAKE A *Spiritual* CONNECTION

---

Studies show a lower divorce rate and higher satisfaction for couples who share some form of spirituality—but that doesn't mean you have to believe the same things. Experts say if you share some type of "sacred" time—ritual, worship, study, reflection time or a volunteer activity—you can add to your marital bond.

*Ellen and Stewart regularly go to a special spot to sit and watch the sun go down. They say it puts them in touch with their God, their universe and the bigger picture. Jim and Ann try to attend the same worship service or share prayer time every morning, making religion a central part of their marriage. Jackie and David make a point of volunteering in their community soup kitchen once a month, and when they do, they feel a spiritual connection.*

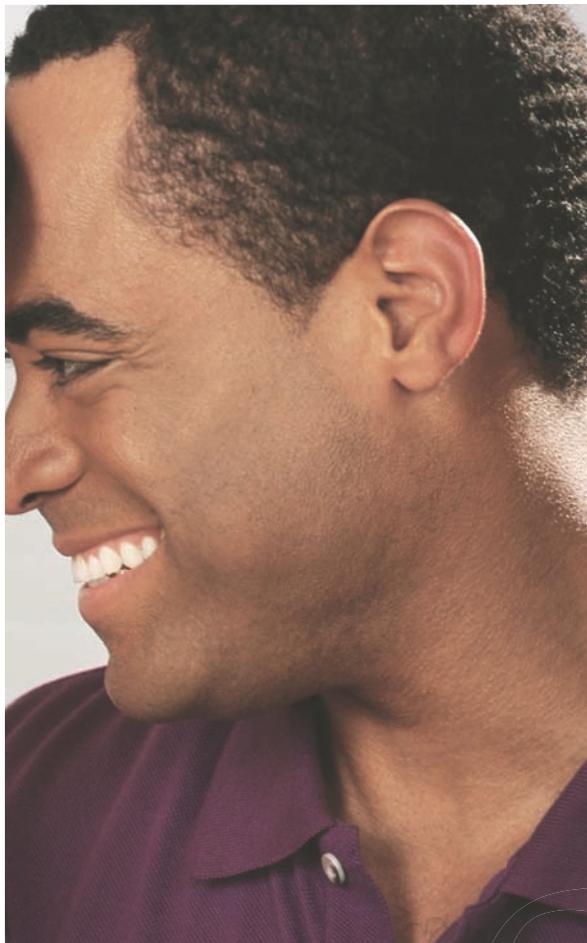
When it comes to creating that spiritual connection, couples say their two biggest challenges are lack of time and dealing with spiritual differences. Spiritual bonding does not happen without sharing spirituality just as sexual bonding does not happen without sex. Couples must make time and learn how to handle their spiritual belief differences. Further, disrespect of your partner's beliefs can be destructive and can force spirituality out of the relationship entirely.



LET *Spirituality*

• BE A BOND,  
NOT A DIVIDE.

*Spirituality*



## TIME APART MAY BE TIME WELL SPENT

---

Couples vary on how much togetherness they want and can handle. Friendships, hobbies and interests can continue even if your partner doesn't share them. At the same time, try to learn to enjoy some activities your partner loves.

*Josh likes to go fishing and hunting with his friend Michael. His wife Kate really enjoys being with the women in her book club. Kate knows that Josh would be brokenhearted if he couldn't fish with Michael. Josh knows that Kate would be sad if she couldn't stay in her book club.*

Josh and Kate sound like they really know and respect each other. However, this situation could easily be the opposite. If Josh were jealous of Kate's time with her book club or if Kate thought she should be Josh's only friend, it could take the life out of the relationship.

## SACRIFICE + COMPROMISE = SOLUTIONS

---

**In a good marriage, each partner is willing to sacrifice his or her own needs for the good of the other.**

Early in relationships, couples make lots of effort to please each other. As time goes by, those efforts can slip. One partner may begin to wonder, "What is he/she doing to meet MY needs?" Learning to compromise and sacrifice your own needs for your partner's can be good for the marriage.

*There are times when Kate agrees to go fishing with Josh because she knows it will please him—even though she would much prefer to stay home and garden. Similarly, Josh agrees to go shopping for furniture with Kate even though he hates to shop.*



## DID I MARRY *ALL* THESE PEOPLE?

WHEN YOU MARRY YOUR PARTNER, YOU HAVE MARRIED AN ENTIRE FAMILY

# Family

Marriage is a blending of two cultures, histories, and traditions. This blending can seem more like mixing oil and water, especially if you are from different faiths or ethnic backgrounds. In the early years of marriage, finding balance is the key.

*Ruth's family expects her to bring her husband Sam "home" to her mom's and dad's place for dinner every Sunday. Sam likes Ruth's family but he wants to spend Sundays alone with Ruth. Sam and Ruth together need to figure out a way to keep their marriage first but allow family relationships to play an important, supportive role.*

No two couples are alike when it comes to juggling their new married life with their families. Ask each other these questions. Your goal is to agree on the answers!

- When and where will we spend holidays and other special events?
- Will we tell our family about our finances?
- Should we ever ask our parents for a loan, or be willing to help out a brother or sister financially?
- What types of family issues is it OK for us, as a couple, to get involved with? Is it OK for me to ask you to "stay out of it" because it's my family?
- How do we keep our personal relationship private? How can we do this but still show respect for our families as sources of support and wisdom?



# WHAT ARE WE ARGUING ABOUT?

## TOP TIFF TOPICS

### 1. MONEY

Money fights are not just about dollars and cents. Money fights are usually about deeper problems: trust, security, self-esteem, control and values.

### 2. SEX

This hot spot is often used as part of a power struggle. One partner may control the money, so the other seeks to control the bedroom. Sometimes arguments about sex have nothing to do with sex at all. Feeling neglected, hurt or angry can often spur a spat about sex.

### 3. CHILDREN

Kids are masters of “divide and conquer” with parents. They work one parent against the other. Raising children is exhausting, plus no two parents come into the relationship with the same background and attitudes. It’s easy to misunderstand and disagree about how to raise the children.

### 4. USE OF TIME & DIVISION OF TASKS

Day-to-day things can wear away at couples. It’s easy to get irritable because of busy schedules. When one partner feels unappreciated or used, arguments can result.

### 5. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships that threaten couple time together or, more important, fidelity can pose problems. Feelings of insecurity or jealousy in your marriage can spill over into other parts of your life.



---

**MONEY FIGHTS ARE OFTEN THE MOST EMOTIONAL  
AREA OF CONFLICT FOR COUPLES.**



# WHY MARRY?

ALL GOOD MARRIAGES HAVE THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES. HERE'S WHAT MARRIED COUPLES SAY THAT THEY VALUE MOST ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGES.

# TOP 10 REASONS FOR A GOOD MARRIAGE

## 1. COMPANIONSHIP

"I KNOW I CAN ALWAYS TALK TO MY WIFE. WE KNOW HOW TO RELAX, LAUGH, AND HAVE FUN TOGETHER."

## 2. FRIENDSHIP

"MY HUSBAND IS ALWAYS INTERESTED IN ME. HE ACCEPTS ME JUST AS I AM, JUST LIKE A BEST FRIEND SHOULD."

## 3. PARTNERSHIP

"IT'S GOOD TO KNOW I HAVE A LIFE PARTNER AND A PARENTING PARTNER. MY HUSBAND SHARES THE WORRIES AND JOYS OF FAMILY LIFE AND RAISING OUR CHILDREN."

## 4. ECONOMICS

"NOW THAT WE'RE MARRIED, WE EARN MORE, SAVE MORE AND SPEND MORE WISELY."

## 5. BETTER HEALTH

"I EAT BETTER AND LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE NOW THAT I'M MARRIED. WE ALSO WATCH OUT FOR EACH OTHER'S HEALTH."

## 6. BETTER SEX

"NOW, OUR SEX LIVES ARE ABOUT OUR DEEP LOVE AND DEVOTION FOR EACH OTHER. FOR ME, MARRIED SEX IS MORE SATISFYING...NOT TO MENTION, SAFER."

## 7. SHARED VALUES & SPIRITUALITY

"WHEN WE TALK ABOUT OUR VALUES, I CAN FEEL THE DEEP CONNECTION. IT'S NICE TO CELEBRATE THE DEEPER MEANINGS OF LIFE."

## 8. CARE & COMFORT

"I KNOW MY HUSBAND WILL BE THERE TO CARE FOR ME AND MY FAMILY AS THE YEARS GO BY."

## 9. SHARED HOPES, DREAMS & MEMORIES

"WHEN I SHARE MY DREAMS AND HOPES WITH MY WIFE, SHE OFTEN HAS THE SAME DREAMS. IT'S WONDERFUL TO KNOW WE WILL SHARE SO MANY MEMORIES."

## 10. COMMITMENT

"OUR LOVE IS NOT JUST A FEELING. IT'S A DECISION. NO MATTER HOW ROUGH THINGS GET, WE'LL STICK IT OUT AND MAKE THINGS BETTER. THAT'S WHAT I CALL COMMITMENT."



# THE DOLLARS & SENSE OF MARRIAGE

## The Economics of Tying the Knot

Getting married often makes economic sense. Two can live cheaper than one. Two can run a household and raise children more economically. And studies show that married couples work harder, earn more and save more than single people or unmarried couples who live together.



Then why is money one of the major causes of conflict in marriages? Experts say that fights about money are often not about dollars and cents but about other issues. They include:

*Self-esteem... Can I earn enough to care for my family?*

*Security... Will we have enough money for the future?*

*Control... Why does my spouse spend money on useless things?*

Whether it's differing backgrounds or an inability to budget, learning to manage your money can be important to the success of your marriage. Here are some tips:

### Money Talks

Each partner has different attitudes and priorities about money. Talk about them. Ask each other about how money was handled in your family.

### Together or Separate

Decide on separate or joint accounts. If you open separate accounts, you'll have to divide the bill-paying responsibilities. Whatever you decide, experts agree that each partner should have some money to spend anyway you want.

### GIVE YOUR PAYCHECK A BOOST

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a special tax benefit for people who work full or part-time and have relatively low incomes. If you qualify, you'll owe less in taxes, and you may get a substantial cash payment even if you don't owe any income tax. If you have a child, you may be eligible for the Child Tax Credit—worth up to \$600 per child. You must file a federal tax return to qualify. For information about tax credit and free help filing your taxes, call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040.

### Money Manager

Decide on how you will keep track of bills and who is responsible for paying them. Discuss how many credit cards you will have. Then set up a system for bill-paying and receipts.

### Budget, budget, budget

Develop a realistic budget for the upcoming year; include weekly or monthly expenses such as food, rent, mortgage payments, insurance, and transportation. Also include occasional expenses such as clothes, car repairs, and new household items. Add these expenses up and compare it against your expected net (post-tax) income for the year. If you have a shortfall, make adjustments—either cut your expenditures or find ways to increase your income. Review your budget on a regular basis.

### Not Just for Rainy Days

Discuss long-range financial plans like buying a home, college funds or vacations. Then discuss how you can achieve them.

### Protect Yourself

Discuss the types of insurances you should purchase including medical and life. Talk about when and how much you will contribute to your pension. Making a will is important, especially if you have children. The will should state your wishes regarding your assets and who should raise your children if both of you should die. Finally, find a source of trusted, independent advice in making financial decisions.

4321 6695 4234 111800

MR. JOHN H. SMITH



# MARRIAGE 101

*Antonio and Jennifer fell deeply in love and wanted to make a life together in marriage. Over the years, they began to drift apart. The time they spent talking, walking and playing was now replaced with the routines of life: paying the bills, working, and taking care of their two children. They did all of these things well, but they found it was not enough when it came to staying close.*

*As they grew more distant, Antonio and Jennifer had a hard time being nice to one another. They were snappy and argued more often. They didn't handle their conflicts well. Voices were raised, nasty things said and the distance grew. Over time, unbeknownst to each other, they wondered what it would be like if they had married different people. They were surprised that they even thought about it. It was so far from what they had planned.*

Sound far fetched? It's not. Antonio and Jennifer's scenario is the same for many couples, and it's important to take steps to insure it doesn't happen to you. **The three keys to keeping your marriage strong are not rocket science.\*** But they take time and energy and deliberate effort.

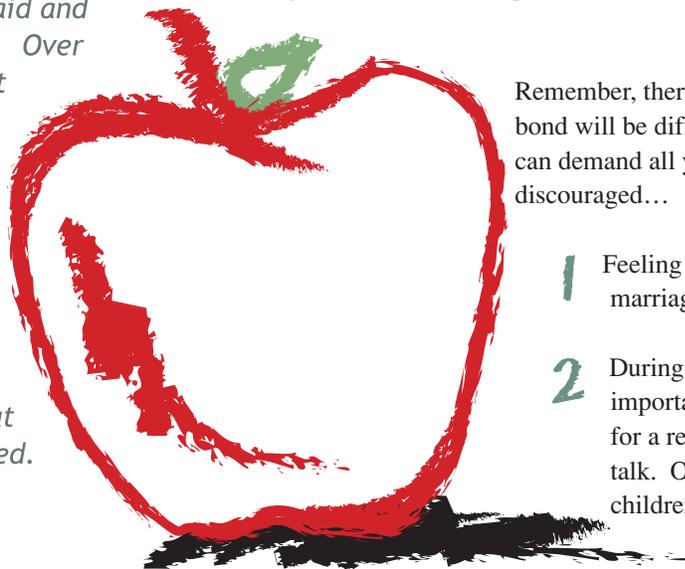
## I. Preserve Your Positive Bond

Like Antonio and Jennifer, partners who truly loved each other on their wedding day can fall out of love over time. It doesn't have to happen, but it will take conscious effort to nourish your love so it will grow and deepen.

Lasting marriages are based on a deep sense of friendship. What do friends do? They take time to talk about their interests and dreams. Sometimes friends just talk all day. Friends don't spend all their time talking about conflicts and problems.

As a married couple, you need to handle the problems, but it's the friendship that sustains your relationship.

What were the activities that built your relationship? Sports? Movies? Cooking? Keep those interests alive. At the same time, find ways to show you care on a daily basis. Show support by helping, talking or touching. For some couples, the key to remaining positively connected is to practice your faith together.



Remember, there will be times when preserving your bond will be difficult. Children, work and other things can demand all your time and attention. Don't be discouraged...

- 1 Feeling a bit more distant and stressed in your marriage is normal during some periods of life.
- 2 During the stressful times, it's even more important to find ways to stay connected. Plan for a regular time each day, even ten minutes, to talk. Occasionally make arrangements for your children so you can spend time together.

*Just a **LITTLE** time together can make a **BIG** difference!*

\* Adapted from *12 Hours to a Great Marriage* by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Natalie Jenkins, and Carol Whitely. John Wiley and Sons, 2004.

## 2. Manage Conflicts and Disagreements Well

Angry fights are one of the most destructive forces in a marriage. Many couples find that one partner is the *pursuer*—the one who brings up problems and urges talks. The other partner is the *distancer*—the one who hates to argue, withdraws or walks away, and this makes the pursuer even angrier! \*

Experts say that regular, nasty conflicts are a leading cause of failed marriages. Not many marriages can survive regular, heated arguments that result in hurtful words. A little bit of negative talk goes a long way in distancing partners and charting a path to divorce or long-term unhappiness. Further, serious and frequent conflicts are very damaging to children. See page 24 for more information about the effects of marital fighting on children.

\*Adapted from John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Three Rivers Press, 1999

### rules of engagement

What are the best ways to manage conflict? Here's what the experts say:

- Agree about how you will stop a fight. When the conflict escalates, some couples use time outs and even humor to end the fight.
- Set a regular time to deal with difficult issues so that you both will be at your best.
- Learn a way to communicate safely. Try the Speaker-Listener Technique described below.

### peace talks: learn the speaker-listener technique\*

All couples need a way to talk about things that are sensitive. The Speaker-Listener Technique is a proven system that will allow you to talk openly; the technique was designed so that each partner can feel safe and respected. It's not necessary that you communicate this way all the time, but it can help with difficult conversations.

#### Rules for the Speaker and the Listener:

1. When the Speaker is talking, the Listener cannot talk or interrupt. Have the Speaker hold something, like a pen or key chain, to remind you that he/she has the floor.
2. Take turns speaking and listening. The Speaker goes first. After the Speaker makes two or three points, switch roles. Continue switching roles until each partner is sure they understand and are understood. Now try to solve the problem.

#### Rules for the Speaker:

1. Speak only for yourself. Express your thoughts, feelings, and concerns. For example, say, "I felt sad when you didn't show up for our lunch." Don't say, "You didn't care enough about me to remember lunch."
2. Don't talk on and on. Say what you need to say in small, manageable chunks. That makes it easier for the Listener.



### Are You a Pursuer or Distancer?

When it comes to fighting, partners often take one of two roles.

**Pursuer**—you bring up problems...you urge, "let's talk about it"

**Distancer**—you hate to argue...you withdraw or walk away

3. Stop after each statement so the Listener can paraphrase—or repeat back what was said. If the Listener clearly understands, the Speaker should say, "That's right," then move on. If the Listener did not paraphrase correctly, the Speaker should gently restate your point using different words. By doing this, you move forward in your conversation.

#### Rules for the Listener:

1. Each time the Speaker stops, remember to paraphrase, or repeat back, what the Speaker has said. Either use the Speaker's words or your own words, but try to convey the Speaker's meaning.
2. Don't argue with the Speaker. Don't give your opinion about what he/she said. Listen carefully and repeat what he/she has said. The point is to make sure you understand the Speaker. Wait until it is your turn as Speaker to express your own feelings.

\* Adapted from *12 Hours to a Great Marriage* by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Susan Blumberg, Natalie Jenkins and Carol Whitely. John Wiley and Sons, 2004 and used by permission of PREP Educational Products, Inc.



*Research shows that practicing the speaker-listener technique just 10-15 minutes each week can change how you talk with each other, especially about the difficult issues.*

### 3. Protecting Your Commitment

Commitment is the foundation of a great marriage. For many couples, it is what they draw on when you work through difficult times. Here are some keys to commitment:

#### **Maintain a long-term view**

It's likely you married because you wanted a future together. Believing in your future and acting on it is key to a successful marriage. Long-term thinking can help you through the ups and downs. Talk together about your dreams. Focusing on the future can help you remember that your marriage is about so much more than just the present.

#### **Protect your marriage from attraction to others**

When you marry, you agree to protect your relationship from attractions to

others. Studies show that couples deeply committed to one another think less often and less seriously about being with someone else.

If you think about being with someone else, you should take clear steps to protect the commitment you've made to your spouse. You have choices. You should choose to think less about other partners. You should choose to limit your contact with others you find attractive.

#### **Make your relationship a high priority**

Many marriages fall apart because couples let the details of life crowd out their relationship. Your partner and marriage should be a high priority. If you don't do this, you will find yourself losing track of what brought you together in the first place.

# Quiz: What are the 3 Most Important Words?

- A. Now I Understand
- B. Maybe You're Right
- C. I Am Sorry
- D. All of the Above

If you answered D, you're right. Long-time married couples say the three phrases above can work wonders. Go ahead and add a fourth to that list: I love you.





# Raising Kids—and Stepkids—Successfully

## The Benefits of a Good Marriage for Children

Strong and satisfying marriages are good for the couple and children as well. It's true that children can grow up successfully in a variety of family types, such as single-parent families. But children have the greatest chance of becoming healthy, well-adjusted adults when they are raised by two happily and continuously married parents. Children benefit from two sets of resources—income, time, attention and love from both mom and dad and their families.

## Keep Your Relationship Alive and Strong

Becoming a parent brings many joys and rewards. It can also create stress in the marriage. The transition to parenthood isn't easy, and children cut into a couple's time together. It's important to find ways to protect your relationship. It may seem natural to spend all your spare time with your child, but couples need to make time to enjoy themselves.

*Like most new parents, Mark and Robyn underestimated how much time it takes to care for an infant. They also discovered that having a child increases housework. Because of the new demands, Mark and Robyn spent much less time doing fun things together, like going out for dinner, watching movies, or just talking. They also had sex less often.*

*The expense of a baby can strain new parents. Mark and Robyn didn't realize how expensive it is to raise a child. They had occasional arguments about money after the baby was born.*

*Because Robyn worked less hours after the birth, Mark worked extra hours to help make ends meet. As a result, Mark often came home exhausted and tense.*

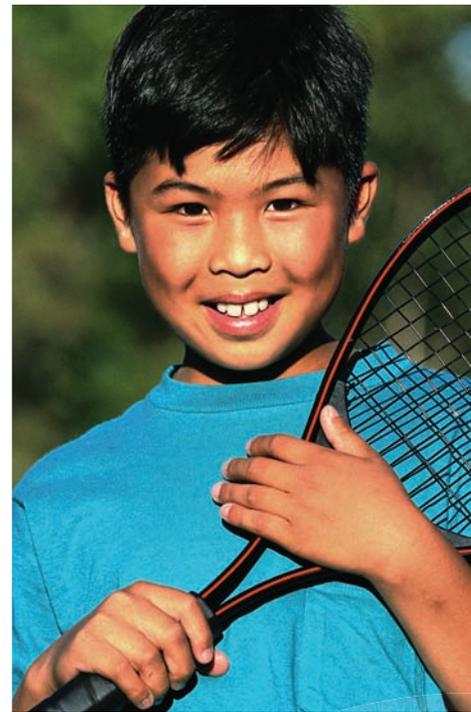
*Mark and Robyn felt so overwhelmed during their first year as parents, they weren't as happy together. They were tired and irritable. Robyn felt that Mark wasn't doing his share of child care, and this resulted in heated arguments. Mark felt Robyn was spending all of her time with the baby and was ignoring him. Plus Robyn was better at comforting the baby, and that made Mark feel less competent as a parent. As a result, Mark spent more time at work.*

**Nurturing your relationship with your spouse does not mean you are neglecting your child. Instead, a strong marriage is one of the best gifts parents can give their children.**

## Take Care of You Two!

**Tips for taking care of your marriage when you have kids.**

1. Set aside a few minutes every day to talk with your spouse—don't limit your conversations to the children.
2. Every week or two, make a date with each other—plan to go somewhere for a few hours without your children and do something you both enjoy. If you can't find or afford a babysitter, trade babysitting with other parents.
3. Make sure to let your spouse know how much you appreciate his/her efforts to be a good parent.





## Find Effective Ways to Parent Together

People have different beliefs about raising children. Some people believe in strict discipline. Other parenting styles are relaxed and permissive. Effective parenting studies show that children tend to develop best when parents are neither too firm nor too relaxed. The experts call this style “**Authoritative Parenting.**”

Authoritative parents set clear rules and limits. They keep track of their children’s behavior. When children misbehave, authoritative parents avoid yelling or hitting. Instead, they talk with their children and explain the reasons behind the rules and consistently follow through the consequences for breaking the rules. As children grow older, authoritative parents allow their children to play a part in setting the rules.

Parents should agree on the major family rules and back up each other’s authority. Consistency is very important. When parents present a united front, children learn to respect parental authority. Couples should

discuss their beliefs about child-rearing early in the marriage—ideally, before marriage.

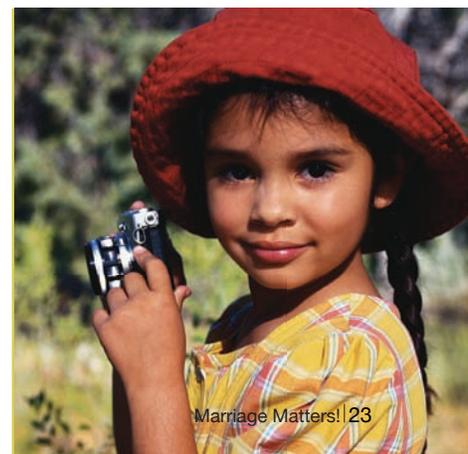
Some parents enjoy active play, even roughhousing. Other parents prefer quiet activities like drawing or reading. No matter your style, the following activities are a must:

- Talk with your children
- Read to your children
- Help your children with their homework
- Offer help and advice with personal problems
- Keep in contact with your kids’ teachers

When it comes to teenagers, keeping the lines of communication open is crucial. **Listen** to them as well as talk to them. Teens need you to show interest in their lives and in their thoughts and opinions. You also need to know who your teen’s friends are, where they are and what they are doing.

**Authoritative parents are warm, loving and firm at the same time.**

A combination of warmth and firmness not only makes children feel secure, but helps them learn appropriate behavior.



# Dealing with Parent Conflict

Not all couples are happily married, and troubled marriages—especially those with high levels of conflict—can be harmful to children. Yelling at or insulting your spouse in front of the children is bad, and shoving or hitting your spouse is worse. These experiences frighten children and undermine their sense of security. When you fight in front of your children, you teach them to resolve conflict in the same way—which is the wrong way. Fighting in front of your children teaches poor relationship skills.

What's worse, children sometimes blame themselves for marital conflict, especially if you argue about child-related issues. Conflict between parents is especially stressful for children if it is unresolved. Children feel much better if they see their parents make up and forgive one another after an argument.

Marital discord can “spill over” into your relationship with your children. For example, a father who is tense because of a fight with his wife may be less sensitive toward his children. He may react harshly if they misbehave. Serious, persistent marital conflict increases the risk of a variety of problems for children such as:

- declining school grades
- misbehavior at home or school
- inability to get along with friends

Disagreements between spouses are normal, and you don't need to always hide arguments from your children. However, they also need to see you interact in positive ways. Children need to see their parents provide emotional support, express appreciation, give compliments and show affection to each other. The skills children learn from watching their parents form the foundation for their future relationships.

**When children see their parents disagree in a *constructive* way and *show respect* for one another, they learn positive ways of *resolving conflict*, like negotiating and *compromising*.**



---

## When Is It Better for Children If Their Parents Divorce?

We've all heard, "It's better for the children now that we're divorced." This statement is partly true, although it is misleading. According to research, children may be better off following a divorce if their parents fought often, were verbally or physically abusive to each other and could not change the destructive pattern.

However, the majority of divorced couples in the studies did not show a long-term pattern of hostile conflict. Instead, they divorced because they drifted apart, one or both were very unhappy and they believed they would find happiness with new partners. Low-conflict marriages that end in divorce increase the risk of a variety of problems for children. These marriages are often "good enough" from the child's perspective. And many—perhaps most—of these marriages can be improved with effort and patience. So divorce is not always in the child's best interest.



# Stepparenting Together

A growing number of marriages involve a second marriage for one or both spouses, and many spouses have children from former unions. Stepfamilies are increasingly common, and they involve unique challenges. If not addressed some of these challenges can undermine the quality and stability of family life. These challenges include:

- how much authority stepparents should have
- problems with divided loyalties
- fairness issues

**R**on and Leslie were newly married and deeply in love. Ron had a six-year-old son who lived with his former wife. Leslie was the custodial parent of an eight-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter. They believed their marriage was a chance to have a real family again. Shortly after moving in together, things began to go wrong. Despite Ron's best intentions, Leslie's daughter resented his presence. Leslie's daughter had grown very close to her mother after the divorce, and she was jealous of the attention her mother gave to Ron.

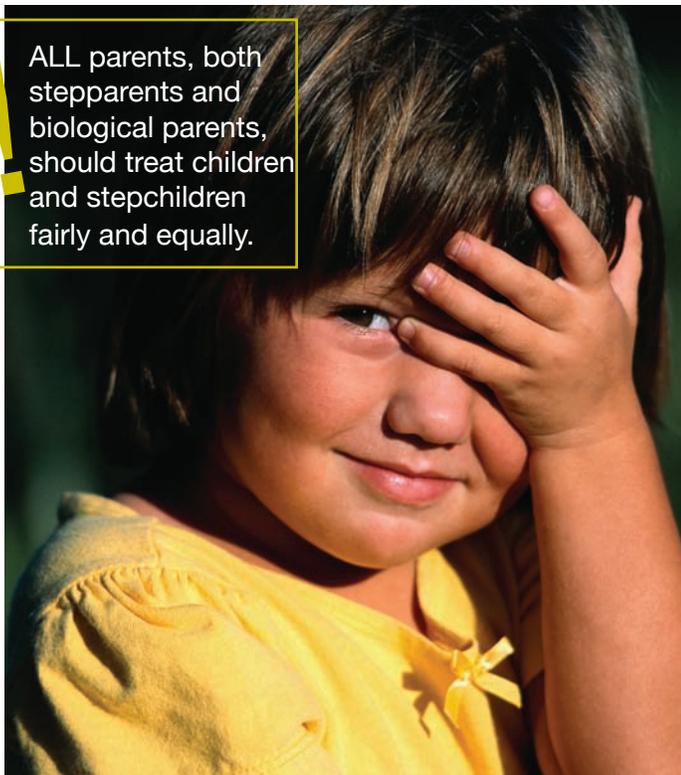
*Both children reacted negatively when Ron exerted authority as the new "father figure." Ron occasionally made sarcastic remarks about the children's biological father, which the children resented. More problems occurred when Ron's son visited each month. Leslie's children pointed out that Ron gave special privileges to his biological son, and Leslie agreed. But since he only saw his son once per month, Ron felt it was okay to "spoil" him during these visits. It took Ron and Leslie several years, marriage counseling and a lot of heartache before they figured out how to make their new family work.*

## Tips for Stepfamilies

1. Stepparents shouldn't try to exert too much authority over their stepchildren within the first year or two. Spouses can formulate the rules together, but it's usually better to let the biological parent enforce the rules.
2. To avoid feelings of jealousy and resentment, custodial parents should have private talks and spend time one-on-one with their children, just like they did before remarrying.
3. Stepparents should not try to compete with the noncustodial parent for children's affection. Remember that children benefit from having positive relationships with a variety of adults.
4. Parents should try their best to treat their biological children and stepchildren equally when they are spending time in the household together.
5. Encourage your children to have a positive relationship with their stepparent, and *other* biological parent. Avoid putting down or criticizing their other biological parent in front of your children.

Forming a stepfamily can be rewarding, but you may not "feel" like a family right away. It takes flexibility and willingness from both partners to negotiate and compromise. Don't expect stepparents and stepchildren to become best friends overnight. These relationships usually take time to warm up.

ALL parents, both stepparents and biological parents, should treat children and stepchildren fairly and equally.





---

# Living Together or Married: Is Marriage Just a Piece of Paper?

---

When couples marry the law treats them differently; they acquire certain obligations, rights, benefits and protections.

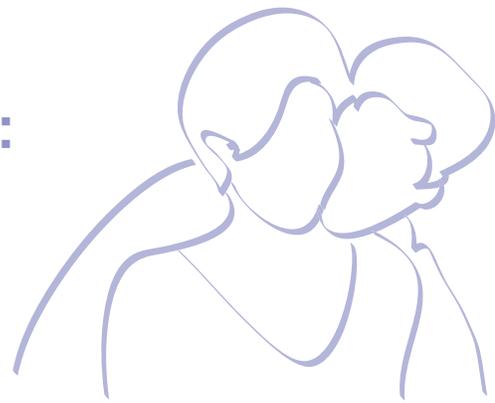
Increasing numbers of couples nowadays are living together and many of these have children.

On the next two pages the table Living Together or Married compares the legal differences between couples who live together and those who are married.

# Living Together or Married:

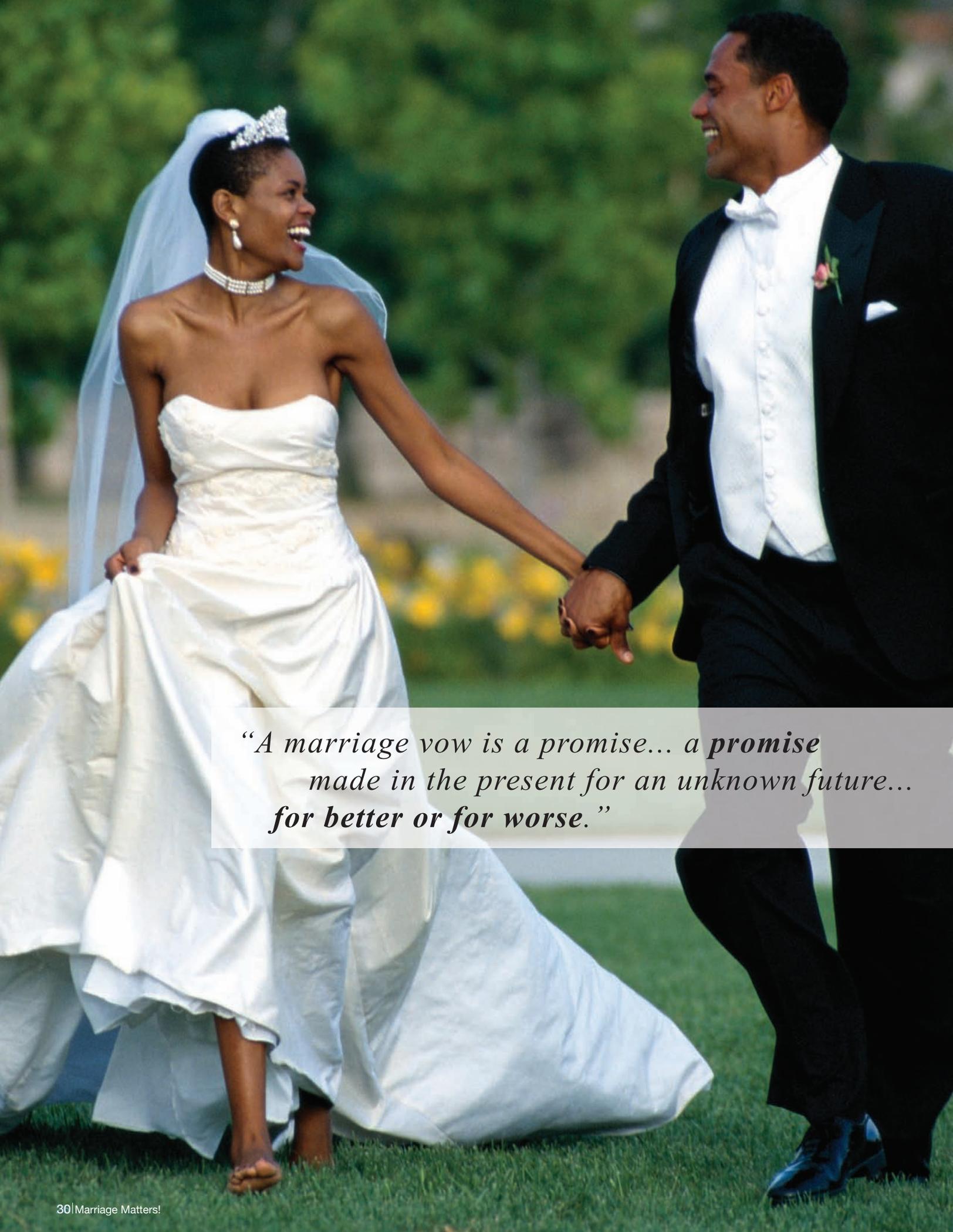
## Your Legal Rights, Obligations and Financial Benefits in Louisiana

### A Side by Side Comparison



Legal Issue	Living Together	Married
Name	None	Marriage does not change either spouse's name automatically but you can choose to use one last name or a combination of both.
Income	Neither person has any legal right to a part of the other's income, or any item purchased with it.	Unless you have a separate legal contract, married couples in Louisiana live under community property laws. The income of each spouse is owned equally by both spouses; this is also true of property acquired with the income. (When applying for a marriage license, ask your Clerk of Court's office for information on Community Property laws.)
Support and Assistance Responsibility	None	Each spouse must financially support the other spouse, and help with tasks required for your life in common. Plus, you are obliged to live together to fulfill these duties.
Debts	One person is not responsible for debts of the other. The unmarried couple is treated as two individuals.	One spouse is liable for a debt of the other only for community property. (When applying for a marriage license, ask your Clerk of Court's office for information on Community Property laws.)
Taxes	An unmarried couple pays taxes as two single individuals.	A married couple may file separately or jointly. In some cases, you may owe less taxes together than when you were single, in other cases more. For taxes due at the death of one spouse (estate tax), the other spouse will normally receive the sizeable "marital tax deduction."
Welfare Benefits	Unmarried couples are usually not treated as a family in determining eligibility for benefits. Check with Department of Social Services about your eligibility.	Generally federal and state welfare programs (FITAP, food stamps, Medicaid) consider the income of the family in determining eligibility. Depending on the amount of the spouse's income, benefits could be reduced or terminated upon marriage. The same may be true for some Social Security benefits.
Illness - Insurance	An unmarried couple is treated as two single individuals.	A married couple can get coverage usually by adding one spouse to the employed partner's employer's insurance plan. Same is generally true for car, medical, dental, life and renter's insurance.

Legal Issue	Living Together	Married
Consent to Medical Treatment and Access	If one person is unable to consent and has not appointed someone with power of attorney, the court may appoint a person to consent. Unmarried partners are generally not permitted access (visiting rights) as a family member under hospital rules.	If you are unable to consent to your own medical treatment, your spouse can consent for you. Further, your spouse is permitted access, i.e. visiting rights, if you are in the hospital.
Social Security Benefits, Pension Benefits and Retirement Accounts	An unmarried couple is treated as two unrelated individuals.	If one spouse dies before retirement, the other spouse may be entitled to his or her Social Security survivor benefits. Check with your employer about spousal rights to pension benefits and retirement accounts.
Wills, Death and Inheritance	Without a will, neither person has a right to inherit from the other or make certain legal claims upon the other's death.	Even without a will, a spouse has a right to inherit from the other, both community property and, to a more limited extent, separately owned property.
Identified as Legal Parent	A parent of a child born out-of-wedlock has financial responsibilities to his child. To prove the father is the parent of the child requires the execution of a legal document called an acknowledgment or a legal proceeding.	A child born to a married couple, or born before his parents marriage, is considered by law to be the child of the husband and the mother. If the child is born before the marriage, the father and mother need only acknowledge the child as theirs in conversation and treat the child as theirs.
Children	If parentage is established, the parent owes child support, and both the parent and child have legal rights as to the other, such as the right to inherit and to sue for wrongful death.	Married parents have the obligation to support their child. The child and the parents have other legal rights and duties toward each other – such as the right to inherit, right to sue for injury or death of the other.
Change of Surname of Child	A child who is a child of two unmarried parents carries the surname of his/her mother unless she agrees to the surname of the father or a combination of both.	A child born during marriage takes the parents' name, either the father's or a hyphenated combination of mother and father. If the child is not a biological child of one of the parents, the child's name does not change unless there is an adoption.
Effect on Child Support	If a person is receiving or paying child support, the income of the other person is considered only if it is proved to reduce the expenses of the recipient or payor.	If a spouse is receiving or paying child support, the income of the other spouse is considered only if it is proved to reduce expenses of the recipient or payor.



*“A marriage vow is a promise... a **promise** made in the present for an unknown future... for better or for worse.”*

# Transitions, Crises and Rough Spots: How to Cope

## Stages and Changes in a Marriage

Marriage starts with a vow. Your vow is a promise to be faithful and supportive for a lifetime of growth and change.

Just as people change as they grow older so does a marriage. If a couple marries at ages 25 and 27, they will be different people at their wedding anniversary ten years later. Expect change—if you don't, you could resist change, seeing it as a failure in your relationship.

Changes are a result of normal family development—births, deaths, illness and the other facts of life cause marriages to change. There may be times when you wonder, “Who did I marry?” Learning to adapt to change is key. Support for each other will help you adapt to both positive and negative change.

*There may be times when you wonder, “Who did I marry?”*

## Feeling left behind...

Life's events can cause one partner to grow in a new direction. This can leave the other partner feeling left behind. Education milestones, work changes, new hobbies and friendships are all changes that could drive a couple apart.

*Harry was the leader in their relationship. Sue was the follower and looked to Harry to make the major decisions. Sue found a great job in their second year of marriage, and she blossoms in her new career. She feels competent for the first time in her life. She's more outgoing, confident and fun. She's also very busy. She's no longer as dependent on Harry, and her changes throw him off balance. He feels less important and needed; he's not sure where he fits into Sue's priorities.*

If you feel left behind because of your partner's changes, it's important to let him/her know. Explain that you don't wish to stop the changes, but you want to feel included.

## When everyone and everything is changing...

Transitions often cause great discomfort, but they are usually temporary. Some transitions can be anticipated; some just happen. Having a child is a huge transition. From the first day of kindergarten to the day they leave home, children offer nearly constant changes. You can expect that one or all members of your family may be changing at the same time. Schooling, career choices and moving are just a few of life's transitions that can upset the balance of a marriage.



*Charlie takes a new job in a new town. In theory it sounded great. In fact, he finds the new work environment is not as friendly. While his wife is having a great time making new friends in the neighborhood, Charlie isn't in the mood to enjoy her good experience, and the children keep whining to go “back home.” Everybody in the house seems to take turns being very irritable with the others, and no one feels much support or sympathy from the others. It's a hard time and not the best moment for the marriage or the family.*

Pay attention to how many major changes have occurred in a two-year period. If there have been huge life events such as a birth, death or financial troubles, it may be wise

not to add new changes that are not essential such as moving into a new house or community. Too much change can mean too much stress—stress for you, your partner, your relationship and your children.

## Life in Crisis...

Ordinary people experience crises...work stress, job loss, financial problems, serious illness and death, to name a few. Some crises have a name like “mid-life crisis.” Infidelity, or a “cheating” partner, is probably one of the most common crises that threaten marriages. Can marriages survive crisis events such as these? Yes, they can. In fact, they are often stronger for it.

Curb the effects of a crisis on your marriage with these guidelines:

### Pay Attention

You may not even realize that your partner is in pain. Pay attention to what your partner feels.

### Words of Wisdom

Try to talk about your feelings openly, then try to find solutions. Go to a marriage counselor or enrichment classes to learn skills to restore good feelings about each other. See page 18 for communication tips using the Speaker-Listener Technique.

### Self-Help

Sometimes just one spouse is unhappy and may need to make changes in his/her life. A change in job, starting a new hobby or exercising could make you feel better, and you find that things in the marriage improve.

## What Do We Do If Our Marriage is in Big Trouble?

While it is not couples plan, some marriages run into big trouble and must cope with serious problems. Sadly, most couples wait too long to find help. Experts estimate that the average couple waits years before getting help, and by that time, it may be too late.

Here are some signs that your marriage may be in trouble. If one or more of these problems is present in your marriage, you should strongly consider seeking help.

### Problems Handling Conflicts

All couples have conflicts. Some couples manage them better. Ask yourself the following questions about your relationship:

- Do we routinely have nasty arguments? Do we use put-downs, name calling, shouting or threats about ending the marriage?
- Does one of us pull away from the other during talks about difficult issues?
- Do little problems often blow up into big, ugly arguments?
- Do we often fight in front of the children?
- Do we seldom or rarely make up?



## Are You Ready For 5-20 Marriages to the Same Person?

Many long-time successfully married couples say that their marriages changed so often, their unions were more like four, seven even 20 different marriages to the same spouse. Here are their top three pointers:

### 1. Be Aware

Ignorance is not bliss. Know and expect change. When your marriage is a priority, you will recognize the change in the relationship.

### 2. Start Over

No couple is perfect. Learn to forgive and let go. Allow yourself and your spouse to change and grow. The relationship will change and grow, too.

### 3. Trust

Trust each other. Trust in the process of growth. Trust that others can help.



If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, your marriage could be at risk. Unless you are willing to change the pattern of persistent problems, your marriage is less likely to make it. Your marriage may stand a better chance with outside help—such as a marriage counselor.

**!** *If your fights include physical or verbal assaults or threats, and/or one partner attempts to control the other, and causes feelings of fear, you need to get special help. See page 34 for information on Domestic Violence.*

### Deep, Growing Sense of Loneliness

If you find yourself feeling very distant and lonely for a long period of time, try talking with your spouse about your feelings. Work together, spend time together and draw each other closer. However, if that doesn't work, it may be time to ask a counselor or clergy person for help in your marriage.

### Financial Woes

Financial troubles come in all shapes and sizes. While they are stressful, financial troubles don't always mean your marriage is headed for trouble. However, certain types of financial problems can wreak havoc on a marriage. Take turns answering these questions about yourself:

- Am I a compulsive spender buying things I cannot afford?
- Can I keep up with the credit card bills? Are they getting larger and larger every month?
- Am I putting aside money for big purchases like appliances, cars or a home?
- Do I gamble often and continually lose money?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, consider seeking advice from a financial counselor or enrolling in a money management class. There are also agencies that can help you with your debt. However, some of these agencies are not reputable and can make your situation worse. Be sure to get references from a trusted source.

### Depression or Mental Illness

Some mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, are very common. Most people have times when they feel low, sad, depressed or even anxious. When these feelings persist for more than a few weeks, they can be a sign of depression. When depression or anxiety does not get better, it can seriously hurt the relationship. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I feel day to day? Do I feel down and sad much of the time?
- Do I have trouble sleeping?
- Have I thought about ways to kill myself, and do I think about this very often?
- Do I have low energy, trouble concentrating? Do I sleep during the day?
- Do I feel anxious, scared, or worried much of the time?
- Do I sometimes feel my heart racing? Do I feel that I am out-of-control?
- Can I do the major tasks I'm responsible for in life?
- Am I productive at work or sidetracked by worry or sadness?
- Am I actively engaged with my children? Or am I too tired?
- Do I feel always distanced from my spouse?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may need to seek mental health care. Ask your family doctor about your options. You can also ask a religious leader for a recommendation. You owe this to yourself, your spouse and your family.

## Substance Abuse and Other Addictions

When one or both partners are substance abusers or addicted to gambling, it puts a huge strain on the marriage. Knowing when the problem is out of control is important. Ask yourself the following questions, then ask your partner to do the same.

- Am I regularly high?
- Do I use alcohol or drugs most every day? Would it be a problem going through a day without alcohol or drugs?
- Does my involvement with drugs or alcohol or gambling interfere with my job, parenting or marriage?
- Do I use drugs or alcohol when alone?
- Do I use more and more drugs or alcohol to get the same effect?

Answering “yes” to any of these questions indicates you may need help. It is hard work to kick the habit of some addictions. There is help available in most communities, either from private counselors, government agencies or private groups like Alcoholics Anonymous.

---

## Infidelity

You expect your mate to be faithful. It’s devastating to find out that your mate has had a relationship with someone else. If you or your mate is having an affair, even an online or “cyber” relationship, this is a sign that your marriage is in serious trouble.

Some affairs are harder to deal with than others. One-time events are often easier for a couple to resolve than long-term relationships. If you are struggling, don’t wait too long to get help. Find a counselor who is experienced with working with couples who have experienced infidelity.



---

## What About Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence can take many different forms. At its core, domestic violence is behavior used to gain and maintain power and control over another person in a marriage or intimate relationship. Ninety-five percent of domestic violence relationships are the result of the male abusing the female.

Batterers’ behavior can include:

- Physical and sexual acts of violence or threats of violence
- Verbal abuse, threats and intimidation
- Control of a partner’s daily activities
- Control of a partner’s use of money
- Isolation of a partner from others
- Attacks on a partner’s spiritual or religious beliefs.

No one in a relationship has the right to force the other person to do, say, feel, think, or pray in any ways other than the ways they choose for themselves. Domestic violence has no place in a healthy relationship. The effects of witnessing a parent abuse the other parent can have life-long negative effects on children.

Domestic violence is a problem affecting couples in communities throughout the country; therefore, victims are not alone and need not be ashamed. Ignoring or denying the problem can only make it worse. The victim did not cause the violent and abusive behavior, and there is nothing the victim can do to make their abuser stop.

If you are a victim of domestic violence, you need to reach out to others who know how to help you through all this. If you are the batterer, you must take responsibility for your actions and choose to stop your violent and controlling behavior. The batterer and victim each need to seek professional help from domestic violence experts. As long as one person fears the other, attending couples education and counseling is not productive and may make matters worse.

**Call the statewide domestic violence toll-free hotline at 1.888.411.1333 for confidential help. Visit [www.lcadv.org](http://www.lcadv.org) to learn more and find help nearest to you.**

# Resources



## Where to go for additional information and help in Louisiana

Find out from the sources listed below if your community offers free or low cost classes or workshops in communication and relationships skills, building a strong marriage, stepfamilies and effective parenting. Seek couples counseling from a faith-based counselor or mental health professional who has had special training in working with couples.

To locate where to go to find jobs or job training, and help with financial issues, housing, food banks, crisis counseling, child care, family support, domestic violence, health, mental health and substance abuse issues call:

- 1 Call your local United Way and ask to speak with the person who can help you find the services you are looking for. The United Way phone number should be listed in the phone book. (In New Orleans area call 269-2673, VIA LINK'S COPE Line . In Baton Rouge call 463-5463, INFO-LINE).
- 2 Family life specialists at the Cooperative Extension Service offer free or inexpensive classes and workshops on money management, parenting and other related issues. Call the nearest branch of the Louisiana State University, Cooperative Extension Service to find out if there are any near you.
- 3 Look on the bulletin board at your local public library for classes, workshops or organizations that can help you. Check out some of the books listed below or video tapes on relationships and other issues.

For addiction-related services, you may also contact your local Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and AI-ANON (phone numbers listed in your yellow pages).

For information and confidential services related to domestic violence contact 1-888-411-1333.

For faith-based assistance:

Roman Catholic: Check with your pastor or the Diocesan Family Life Office about marriage-related services in your community. Most Dioceses offer premarital preparation programs and Marriage Encounter weekends and some have programs specifically for those getting re-married. New Orleans and Baton Rouge Dioceses also offer Retrouvaille, a program for marriages in crisis or facing serious, tough issues. This program is led by married couples and open to all faiths and is offered free or for a voluntary donation. (1-800-470-2230)

Baptist and other Protestant denominations, Jewish and Muslim faiths: Check with your local minister, rabbi, or cleric in the community, or on campus, for referrals for couples counseling services. The state Baptist Convention offers occasional marriage enrichment retreats.

For information about marriage services provided in North Louisiana's Shreveport/Bossier area, Central Louisiana, or the greater Baton Rouge area that have signed Community Marriage Agreements, contact Gene Mills by phone at 225.344.8533 or by email at [genemills@lafamilyforum.org](mailto:genemills@lafamilyforum.org).

### Selected books

This is a selection of the numerous books that are available. For additional titles consult the web sites listed below:

Gary Chapman (1995). *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Northfield Publishing.

Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobsen (2002). *Reconcilable Differences*. Guilford Press.

Michele Weiner Davis (2001). *The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage*. Simon and Shuster.

Anita Doreen Diggs and Vera S. Paster (1998). *Staying Married: A Guide for African American Couples*. Kensington Publishing Corp.

Kathleen and Thomas Fischer (1991). *Promises to Keep: Developing the Skills of Marriage*. Paulist Press. (This book is used by Diocesan Family Life ministries.)

John Gottman and Nan Silver (1999). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Three Rivers Press.

Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Susan Blumberg, Natalie Jenkins, and Carol Whiteley (2004). *12 Hours to a Great Marriage*. John Wiley and Sons.

Nicky and Sila Lee (2002). *The Marriage Book: How to Build a Lasting Relationship*. HTP Publications, London, UK [www.alpha.org.uk](http://www.alpha.org.uk). (This book is used by many evangelical ministries.)

Les and Leslie Parrott (1996). *Questions Couples Ask: Answers to the Top 100 Marital Questions*. Zondervan Publishing House.

Emily B. Visher and John S. Visher (1991). *How to Win as a Stepfamily*. Bruner/Mazel. or [www.saafamilies.org](http://www.saafamilies.org).

### Selected web sites

[www.bettermarriages.org](http://www.bettermarriages.org). Association for Couples and Marriage Enrichment.

[www.saafamilies.org](http://www.saafamilies.org). Stepfamily Association of America.

[www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com). The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education.

(This website has lists of books, tapes, and links to programs and courses offered around the USA.)

[www.vialink.org](http://www.vialink.org). VIA LINK'S online directory of community services.



# Marriage Matters!

