

Premarital Counseling Builds Better Union

Counseling Before Marriage Makes Couples Stronger

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April 4, 2003 - Thinking about getting married but afraid the odds of a happy [marriage](#) are stacked against you? A new study shows premarital counseling can put the odds in your favor and help build a stronger, more successful marriage.

The research reviewed 23 studies on the effectiveness of premarital counseling and found that the average couple who participates in a premarital counseling and education program reports a 30% stronger marriage than other couples.

"After participating in these programs, couples reported or were observed to be better at resolving problems using effective communication styles, and on average, they reported higher levels of relationship quality," says researcher Jason S. Carroll, assistant professor of marriage, family, and human development at Brigham Young University, in a news release. "They feel a higher sense of partnership and report a higher level of adjustment to married life than couples who did not receive premarital education."

Researchers say a happy marriage is one of the most important life objectives for 93% of Americans and a greater emphasis on premarital counseling and education might be one way to help people achieve that goal.

They recommend couples considering marriage take one or any or all of the following steps to help ensure a happier union:

- Participate in a formal premarital counseling and education program.
- Together, seek premarital advice from a counselor or religious leader.
- Complete a couple's assessment questionnaire to evaluate relationship strengths and challenges.
- Read a book together about how to build a successful marriage.

The study, which appears in the April issue of *Family Relations*, found that premarital counseling programs were generally effective at producing immediate and short-term gains in interpersonal skills and overall relationship quality. But little is known about the long-term effects of these programs.

Researchers say they were surprised to find the impact of premarital counseling was similar to the effect of marriage counseling for couples that were already married.

"Couples didn't come into these programs believing they needed a major overhaul - their motivation for change is even a bit muted, yet they are still experiencing a measurable level of improvement," says Carroll. "Despite being oriented toward long-term preparation, these programs had an immediate, positive effect on couples."

Carroll says it's not necessarily true that couples who seek premarital counseling are more motivated for their relationship and marriage to succeed than other couples. In fact, one study that they reviewed found that couples that participated in premarital counseling were similar in this regard to those couples who do not.

Researchers say the findings suggest that premarital counseling is a good investment for couples who are serious about preparing for a lifelong commitment.

"It also supports state legislation such as Minnesota's statute that gives a waiver of marriage license fees for couples who participate in a high-quality premarital education program," says Carroll.

SOURCES: *Family Relations*, April 2003. News release, Brigham Young University.
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