

Premarital Counseling Program

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MFT 509

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Marriage is a very important step into anyone's life, but how much do we really think about it? How serious do we take that decision? What type of investment do we take into consideration?

Research shows that 20% of marriages end within just two years after the "I Dos" and yet almost no thought goes into getting ready for the "happily ever after".

Such a serious decision should be met with an equally important approach. That is why we have designed this seventeen session long premarital course to help couples enter into their marital lives and to reap the benefits of such divine union and commitment. While premarital counseling cannot guarantee that all marriages will be successful it can be a useful process and investment.

The first session is an open ended session, capped at 120 minutes, and the duration will be determined by the needs of the couple.

The other sixteen sessions are a 90 minute session designed to educate and provide the couple with tools that can be utilized in their marital life as well as in life in general. While the sessions are built using proven methods, the commitment of the couple is a must have in order for the course to be effective and the outcome the best possible. Lack of commitment is also a cause for termination (please see termination policy). The sessions will be built into one another and the skills acquired are of life long use, allowing

you as a couple to reap the benefits of your work for years to come. The SYMBIS assessment, a 30 minute per person online assessment is the first step and will be a prerequisite for the first session.

Session #1 Will be an intake session where the therapist will make an assessment of the couple as individuals and as a pair.

This session is designed to understand the couple's personality, their strengths and areas of growth. The SYMBIS(Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott) assessment will be explained and reviewed. In this session the way the couple behaves and interacts and dynamics of the relationship will be assessed. The reasons for marriage will also be explored and if any unhealthy reason is noted a separate individual session will be scheduled before the couples next session.

Session #2 Individual assessment

This session is designed to understand how each person sees himself and the differences and similarities in between the couple. In this session we will identify the love language of each person and use a guessing game to see if each other really knows their partner's love language.

Each person will answer a few questions to be used to identify their love language. After identifying the love language each person will write in a paper what they believe to be the love language of their partner. It is a fun and easy way of facing differences and understanding each other's love language.

Session #3 Facing the Myths of marriage

This session is designed so that couples can better understand their views of what marriage is really like. What does each person expect from marriage? What are their views about it? This session will address the myths of marriage and allow the couple to be on the same page or at least understand where they stand when it comes to expectations, roles and reality. Sometimes people hold on to the idea that their spouse's purpose in marriage is to make them whole and happy. Homework will be given and it encompasses each

person writing about their feelings and how they believe their marriage will be in one year, two years and 10 years?

Session #4 and 5 This session will start with the review of the homework and will be followed by Family history and dynamics

Usually the exercise of writing about the expectations of marriage in the future is influenced by our own family history and dynamics. This session is designed to explore how our family shapes our expectations of our spouses. We will take an inventory on "destructive family traditions" and the couple will explore how their experiences may have shaped and formed their reality. Materials Family Myths, Family Secrets, Circular Communication, Family Roles and Multigenerational Pattern Assessments (Stoop, Dr. David & Stoop, Jan. Thomas).

Session #6 Communication Inventory

This session is designed to understand the couple's communication style and to educate and guide the couple to communicate in a deep meaningful manner. Is the couple able to communicate their feelings? How does each person feel about the communication in the relationship? Do they engage in settling in order to avoid conflict? In this session "I" statements will be introduced as a tool to better communicate. The couple will take turns in between expressing feelings and listening to each other.

Session #7 Managing Conflict and Managing stress

Conflict usually starts with the little things and in most cases it is because we as individuals have a hard time really addressing the important issues or sometimes are not able to identify such issues. Understanding "the hot topics" and what buttons not to push is always a good way of managing conflict. Many times couples deal with stress in a different way. What may come across as "he is ignoring me" may just be the need to have some peace and quiet before addressing home life. This session is designed to lay the differences on the table and to allow compassion and comprehension to enter the relationship.

How to avoid criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling in the relationship. How to phrase feelings in a way that gets the message across instead of hurting the other person.

Session #8 Anger Management

The first step towards anger management is understanding anger, how it manifests and how to deal with it in a healthy manner. Understanding how harmful out of control anger can be and how it affects the relationship can be a helpful tool not only in marriage but also in life. In this session we will introduce the concept of "taking a time out" as a tool to prevent the conflict from escalating. Many mindfulness techniques can be used to calm a person down. The use of "I" statements instead of "you" statements. While displays of anger can be found throughout the Bible it is never intended to be used as an abusive way or controlling way.

Session #9 Conflict Resolution

This session will focus on how to deal with conflict when it arises. How to state feelings in a clear and appropriate way. Not all battles are worth fighting for and how to identify the ones that are. Understanding the potential for future blowouts when feelings are repressed and not dealt with. How to identify the solution, rate the intensity of the feelings, compromise and cooperate with each other.

Session #10 Forgiveness

Understanding what forgiveness is and what it is not. While forgetting is many times part of forgiveness it is not forgiveness. To work through the hurt and the feelings that sometimes seem unbearable and to grant forgiveness in a marriage can become a strong component in the commitment and in the health of the union. Understanding the imperfect world we live in and that we are imperfect too can be difficult but may make forgiveness more palpable. Holding a grudge can turn into resentment and resentment can turn into an ugly monster allowing many other unhealthy feelings and actions to enter the marriage and to

really compromise its state. Understanding that to forgive one must be willing to do so is a very powerful realization. This is one area where faith can play an enormous role in a person's life.

Session #11 Intimacy

Understanding each other's likes and dislikes. Intimacy does not mean spontaneity all the time. Intimacy can be reached in planning and making time for each other. The brain is the main organ in sex drive and it needs to be fed. Understanding the importance of touching, sensuality and connection. Understanding gender differences and how the body and mind play a role in the intimacy of each person.

Session #12 Spiritual Intimacy

Spiritual intimacy really is the cherry on top and what makes couples fulfilled and connected. When a couple experiences spiritual intimacy the marriage enters a very new stage and all other aspects of the union become more expressive and meaningful. Praying together, serving together can be powerful tools in reaching intimacy and closeness.

Session #13 Wedding Planning

Understanding how the couple can work together, using strengths and weaknesses to delegate responsibility and share the work. Too often the task of planning a wedding falls into the responsibility of the bride, who in turn becomes overwhelmed and stressed. What is supposed to be the first of many happy days together becomes a blueprint for the relationship. Making a list of each other's strengths can really help in the task. Many of the tools learned earlier in the counseling can become effective and helpful during this time.

Session #13 Planning a Family

This session is designed to assess couples desires and to check how they may deal with some issues that were not considered before. While many couples talk about the importance of having kids, many don't

address the quantity or how soon they plan on having them. Being on the same page can be a powerful tool and a predictor in the health of the relationship. Addressing these issues as well as bringing to their attention some unexpected issues is a good idea. How would they deal with an abnormality in the fetus? The loss of a pregnancy or even infertility? Many people don't think about these issues and they become totally overwhelmed and incapable of solving them.

Session #14 Planning the Finances

What is planned in the matter of finances? Are they totally transparent with each other? Do they have debts? How are they planning on addressing the issue? Are they planning on having a joint checking account or individual? Financial issues and secrets can deteriorate a marriage very fast. Addressing these issues before the wedding is a good idea.

Session #15 Planning a Future

What are the couple's visions for the future? What are their professional and individual desires? How do they manage to achieve it? Are they in agreement with each other? Where do they need to compromise? Assessing future plans can be a great tool to help a couple share a vision and envision a long lasting relationship.

Session #16 Evaluation

For fifteen sessions we have worked on strengthening the bonds and smoothing the kinks out of the relationship. Now it is time to hear about the experience and how the couple sees their future marriage. Do they feel empowered and even more ready for the commitment? Are they having second thoughts and need to put in the breaks in the relationship? What was it like for them the past fifteen sessions?

Termination policy

The success of the program is really determined by the amount of investment the clients put into it as a couple and as individuals. Missing sessions constantly, not doing the homework or putting little effort on the program will be cause for termination.

The best possible outcome is achieved by understanding and respecting the role of the therapist in the program. However if either party feels that such regard is not respected or that it is not in their best interest the program can be terminated by either party.

All persons are welcomed into the program and while this is a program focused on the Christian view it is not limited to Christians or any other couple configuration. God embraces all.

Resources

- Parrot, Dr. Les, Leslie,(2015) *Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts*, Seven Questions to Ask Before and After you Marry(Zondervan) Yates & Yates.
- Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., Bryan, M.(2014). *A Lasting Promise:The Christian guide to fighting for Your Marriage*(New and rev. ed).