

Premarital Counseling:

The strategic Plan for a Special Blend of Enrichment and Preparedness

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When setting up guidelines for everything my premarital counseling will include and base itself on, the standard I set in place will be the foundation for sessions that I will follow with my couple. However, I know that every couple differs and no two situations are the same, therefore, the number of sessions, frequency of sessions, and content within the session will most likely differ a little between each client. My biggest take away from the prepare-enrich program was the importance of personalization for each couple. There will be couples who walk into my office that are getting married within 12 months, and some will be coming in within 3 months of their wedding date. Some couples will struggle more with intimacy and communication and some will need to focus on finances and family life a little more. No matter the differences between each pair of people that I come in contact with, my goal will be to equip the couple with tools to be able to handle situations that come up, understand one another, communicate in healthier ways, and keep intimacy all throughout the life of the marriage. I will recommend that all couples who want premarital counseling or enrichment with me will need to complete eight sessions of 60 minutes before their wedding date.

Session 1:

The very first session will be an intake session, where the couples can take some time to know what to expect from these next 7 weeks. I want this to be a space where I can get to know the couple and where they can get to know me. This will also be an important time to talk about certain policies, expectations, and confidentiality concerns. The policies I discuss with my clients will be on topics including certain things like cancellations, missed appointments, and our confidentiality agreement. The expectation coming into the first session with each couple is that they have taken the prepare-enrich assessment so I can grab a better understanding of them as a couple. I will be using some tools for the prepare-enrich workbook and facilitators manual paired

with outside resources that fit my style of counseling the best. I will go through everything briefly that I want to cover with them and then after having gone through what my touch point goals for the next seven sessions, I want to explore what their hopes and goals are for doing premarital counseling. Since I want to give my couples the most tools that they can whip out of their back pocket at any time to ensure that they have a successful and lasting marriage, after every session I will offer some homework they can do often or a book they can buy and read now or later. After session one, I will offer that they read *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* and the workbooks that come with it as well.

Session 2:

For session two we will spend the first half looking into the prepare-enrich workbook for sharing growth and strength areas. I believe starting off with sharing growth and strength areas for the first content based session is important because it gives the couples a good sense of how they think they are doing in the relationship, how they think their partner thinks about the relationship, and then the reality of what is actually occurring in the relationship. After the growth and strengths discussion, the couple and I will transition to education about the five love languages. Talking about this early will be key to establishing how to grow in a more intimate way and use language around concerning feelings of contentment or unfulfilled-ness. This tool will be used throughout the following sessions and probably for the rest of their married life. For homework I will assign them to do the daily dialogue assignment in the prepare-enrich workbook to emphasize the importance of how they speak to each other every single day. I'll encourage them to use the new found knowledge about love languages while doing the daily dialogue assignment because how couples speak to each other through their love languages means that their partner can hear them and receive their love more clearly

Session 3:

This session will be a little heavy, but to me, this is by far the most important section to go through with my couples. I will be using tools that I have learned from the prepare-enrich version of the active listening model as well as the speaker-listener technique from *A Lasting Promise* by Scott Stanley. This model is going to help couples learn how to have active and productive conversations, especially when a conversation isn't going anywhere or is getting out of control. The first step to using this model is first, learning how to take a time out, which the resource *A Lasting Promise*, shows couples how to do very well. Moving forward to the most important step; coming back to the conversation using the speaker-listener technique. After spending time in this session learning about this technique, I will have them practice with me in the section of the prepare-enrich workbook titled "creating a wishlist." This gives couples the opportunity to practice on topics that aren't too harsh or triggering so they can get an idea of how to go about this technique the right way. Homework will be assigned this week to practice taking a timeout and coming back, using the speaker-listener technique that week on any issue, problem, or conversation that comes up. Journal about it immediately after so the memory can stay fresh and we can talk about how it went during the following session.

Session 4:

The halfway point will be session four, where the couple and I focus on their family by looking at their couple map and family map in the prepare-enrich workbook. Similarly to the growth and strength areas, this activity serves the purpose of getting the couples to see where they think the relationship is, where they think their partner thinks of their closeness, and then they can talk about where it should be. Furthermore, the map is also done for their own personal family units so they can see how that corresponds to why they view their relational closeness a

certain way. Continuing the conversation about families, for the second half of the session, we will talk about children and parenting. I will have them brainstorm a few things about what they want to take from their own parents or childhood and what parenting techniques they don't want to take from their parents or childhood. Using the speaker-listener technique they can discuss these things together. It will also be important to talk about when they want children and how many they would like to have together. For homework after session four, I'll assign them to build a genogram with each side of their family and discuss it together. My hope will be for them to get detailed and creative and have fun doing it while learning about themselves and each other's family of origin.

Session 5:

This session will be all about personalities and gathering tools so couples can understand one another better. Having language around why people react the way they do and how to counteract certain situations because of their personality is going to make understanding one another that much easier. Using the scope personality assessment from the prepare-enrich workbook and facilitators manual, I'll run through the five personality dimensions and then they can start a conversation about similarities and differences they find within each dimension. I really like this tool because it compares them to each personality type and gives advice on how they should grow despite the differences or similarities, how to communicate through them, and how to navigate each other more efficiently. Another personality assessment I love is the enneagram because this shows why each person may react to stress and intense situations. It's a pretty complex personality evaluation and studying this can lead down a long rabbit hole of information, so for this session I will have them just take the test, read through their personality types and how it pairs with each other. This session will have no required homework, just a

suggestion that they take a further look into their enneagram and I'll recommend *The Road Back To You* by Ian Morgan Cran and Suzanne Stabile because it pairs the enneagram with Christian and spiritual values.

Session 6:

Many couples that are engaged do not take the necessary amount of time to have a conversation surrounding finances and many don't start that conversation at all. I think for newlyweds, this is extremely important because, for the first time, their "my" money turns into "our" money. The prepare-enrich workbook has some really good financial activities to get the ball rolling and conversation started about finances. During this session I would like to go through the activity "the Meaning of Money" so they can understand what's important to them when it comes to money and what's also important to their partner. The good thing for couples to remember, is that everyone was raised differently and had different views and expectations that they hold on to money and it's heavily influenced by their family of origin. However, they are creating their new family unit and can place their own emphasis on different things. For homework, I'll assign them to do the next financial management sections which are "Priorities" and "Importance of Financial Goals."

Session 7:

Assuming that my couple is Christian (or a believer), this session will be all about spiritual beliefs and praying for one another in the relationship. We will go through the questions listed in the "spiritual beliefs" section of the prepare-enrich workbook and use the speaker-listener technique to have that conversation. Many couples of faith use their faith and religious beliefs for the bases of everything in their life and there are so many different variations of faith and denominations. This means it's important for couples to have this conversation about each

other's spiritual beliefs so they can connect smoothly when they ultimately start their life together and bring their faith together. Their homework for that week will be to pray for and with one another and I'll give them a resource from *A Lasting Promise* that has an amazing activity about praying for each other within marriage and explains how important and intimate it is.

Session 8:

The last session before their wedding date will just be a closing session to answer any questions that they have left or go through anything briefly that they really wanted to get through. This will be a time where we can process, review, and they can give feedback on certain resources, activities and topics that were helpful or not so helpful. Afterwards, we will reflect on the growth that has happened within these eight weeks and discuss all the positives premarital counseling has accomplished. This will be my time to really speak affirmations into their relationship and wish them well on their journey into life together. However, I will suggest to them that time together shouldn't just end here, because this was the easy part and marriage is the hard part. I'm hoping that the couple I am counseling would like to meet for an enrichment session a year, three years, and then 5 years after their marriage. This just ensures that they continue to be enriched and know that when hard times come down, they have tools and plenty of resources to help them get through those tough conversations, spells of no intimacy, and roads with no traction. Finally, we will end the session by coming up with some of their goals for the first year of their marriage. I would also like to pray over their marriage and send them off with blessings and bible verses to always refer back to.

My termination policy will mostly be for missed appointments with no reschedule because most couples that come for premarital counseling only have a short timeline until their wedding and 8 sessions is a lot to get through. I wouldn't want anything to be rushed or skipped,

so if the client were to cancel appointments that made it where we could not finish before their wedding date, I would have to terminate my time with them all together. When it comes to physical/drug abuse or cheating, if it's still actively present in the relationship, I would terminate and refer them out to a therapist who is licensed. I believe that before they should get married or do premarital counseling, those more serious issues should be handled first. Personally, I believe that marriage means that a couple is entering into a covenant relationship with God so I would only want to counsel couples that are believers. This doesn't mean that the couples had to be super religious or practice their faith daily, but I want to work with couples who know or want to learn about the sanctity of marriage and pursue that throughout the many years they have together. When it comes to sexual purity before marriage, I would not have any policy that says my couple has to remain sexually inactive once they become engaged or come into counseling with me. However, I will offer my couple the opportunity to enter into a purity covenant in our first session that will be open for them to sign or commit to at any time.

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