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## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS *Marriage Prep 101*

The American wedding industry rakes in over \$50 billion each year. With average wedding tabs hitting the \$35,000 range, it certainly causes one to ask if we've put the cart before the horse. Have we spent more time, money, and energy investing into a wedding than a marriage?

### MARRIED LIFE AFTER THE ALTAR

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy has developed models to assess future marriage satisfaction. Social scientists employ a variety of factors and questions in making their determination. This method is known as the marriage triangle and highlights three areas: individual traits, couple traits, and personal and relational contexts.

- **Individual Traits** - Our overall emotional health, values, attitudes, and beliefs comprise our individual traits. Positive and negative behaviors are analyzed, as well as each individual's beliefs about marriage. Some examples are: flexibility, self-esteem, depression, and impulsiveness.
- **Couple Traits** - How do you communicate and resolve conflict as a couple? How long have you known each other? Sharing similar values and goals is a positive factor, while living together as a trial marriage is a negative one.
- **Personal and Relationship Contexts** - Take some time discussing your family of origins. How is/was your parents' marriage? Have either of you been previously married? Are there existing children? Do your parents and friends approve of your relationship?

### READY FOR MARRIAGE?

Is talking with a therapist, minister, or social scientist really necessary before the wedding? You decide. Marriage preparation is not intended to assign a passing or failing "grade," nor is it used to assess future happiness. Rather, premarital assessment questionnaires encourage couples to see strengths and weaknesses through communication. Results guide couples to identify important topics before marriage to avoid these becoming larger issues later. The cost for a relationship assessment is fairly inexpensive.

Most churches or religious organizations offer, and may require, marriage preparatory classes. These often cover necessary topics, such as communication, children, finances, religion, sex, family involvement, gender roles, and health. Dialoguing about what marriage means and entails to you and your intended is a helpful conversation to have before the altar to determine marriage readiness.

Remember, marital bliss is not just a fairy tale. It is possible with real effort, authentic communication, and two people committed to common goals. Set your marriage up for success by planning for more than just the wedding.





## SOUND FINANCES

### Financial Assistance for Caregivers

Change affects every family. Whether anticipated or sudden, a loved one may need additional help with housecleaning, meals, laundry, and personal care. Family caregivers can ease the burden, but it may add other struggles. Caregivers often feel physical and emotional stressors, difficulty juggling work and caregiving responsibilities, and time constraints. Additionally, financial hurdles and hardships affect many caregivers too. However, there may be financial help available.

#### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OPTIONS

There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to caregiver financial assistance. Finding time to research options may seem daunting. And where do you even begin? Local Area Agencies on Aging or [www.benefitscheckup.org](http://www.benefitscheckup.org) are helpful starting points. There are several programs available, including: state, veterans, and long-term care insurance.

- **State Programs**- Assistance programs vary by state and can be titled under any of the following program names: consumer-directed, participant-directed, or cash and counseling. These plans help pay for a caregiver of choice. It's important to note there are income and eligibility requirements for the caregiver of choice, with some states being stricter than others. To find out if your state has a caregiver financial assistance program, contact your local Medicaid office or Aging Services Department. You can also find the National Resource Center for Participant-Directed Services at [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org).
- **Veterans Programs** - Caregivers of veterans may qualify for additional assistance. A law passed in 2010 provides a stipend for primary caregivers of any injured veteran in military conflict since 9/11. Benefits may include travel

expenses, health care insurance, and mental health services. Caregivers of injured veterans prior to 9/11 may still qualify for assistance. Contact 1-877-222-VETS for more information.

- **Long-Term Care Insurance** - If your family member has long-term care insurance, there's a possibility it may cover home care. Some policies allow family members to be paid provided they do not live in the same household. Contact your family member's insurance agent to explain the policy and its benefits and conditions.

When acting as a caregiver, it's important to practice good self-care. Constantly seeing to the needs of others can leave you depleted. While the rewards of caring for a family member are real, so are the costs. Take good care of yourself to better care for your loved one.



## THINKING WELL

### Reading Rewards

Read anything enjoyable lately? When was the last time you found yourself completely immersed in a good book? You know, the kind of book or article where you lose all track of time and space. The one you can't wait to pick up and dread having to put down. Been a while? You're not alone.

As society continues to lean heavily on a screen-based culture, it prompts us to question if we're nurturing a culture of reading for ourselves and the next generation. Believe it or not, reading is a skill developed over time. When we jump to the immediacy of screen-based entertainment, we find our reading skills undernourished, lacking, and possibly regressing.

#### DEVELOPING A LOVE FOR READING

There's many reasons why people dislike reading. Perhaps, reading was a forced pastime or negative learning experience. Whether we enjoy reading or not, human nature will automatically lean toward doing

that which we find pleasurable. For some of us though, reading is a learned joy, and our love for it develops over time. The investment of reading for pleasure is worth it, as numerous studies show reading has emotional, mental, and even social benefits.

- **Emotional** - Reduce stress, cure boredom, and enjoy an overall positive sense of well-being all from diving into your favorite page-turner. Reading for pleasure has also been shown to decrease depression symptoms.
- **Mental** - Create a deeper thirst for learning by pleasure reading. Strengthen your vocabulary and grammar skills, all while improving your cognitive development. Books over screens increase a student's desire to learn, resulting in higher test scores and more positive attitudes.
- **Social** - Did you know a book for pleasure could actually encourage empathy and

strengthen people skills? As we identify with characters and cultures on the page, it translates into our everyday mindset toward others.

#### PLEASURE READING POWER

Simply put, pleasure reading is anything you choose to read. There's many forms and benefits to reading for enjoyment. Fiction reading, such as novels, short stories, jokes, comics, poetry, lyrics, plays, and scripts all count as examples of pleasure reading. Not your thing? Try reading non-fiction works, like reference books, newsletters, letters, emails, biographies, memoirs, newspapers, websites, or magazines.

So whether you're a historical fiction novel lover or a political news magazine fan, do yourself a favor this winter. Sip on your favorite hot beverage and improve your overall life. Here's to turning a new page!





## COUNTY FOCUS

*Be Curious: It Just Might Help You and Others Get Along Better*

A key benefit of working at the County of Santa Clara is the opportunity to work with and for people who are "different" from us. Personal differences can feel threatening or invigorating. Having actual contact with "different" people can help us grow in empathy, compassion, and understanding. Having regular exposure to people who at first seem unlike you helps you understand how much we all have in common.

Let's look further: You meet somebody who is "different." They have a different skin color, wear unusual clothes, or talk about religious customs unlike yours. They have an "accent" (translation: they don't talk the same way as you). They are much younger or much older. They mention a same-sex partner, or living with but not being married to their opposite sex partner, or being married for thirty years. They espouse political views different from yours.

### Which approach do you take?

**Approach #1:** You make assumptions about the person. You lump them into a "category" and assume you know all about them. You may have a generalized label or negative adjective pop into your head. You may say or think something like, "All X's are Y." When you talk with them, you have an internal picture about who they are which impacts your body language and the actual words you use to communicate.

**Approach #2:** You remain curious about the person in front of you. If they say things that are confusing or you disagree with - or even anger you - you avoid immediate arguments or simplistic overgeneralizations. You may ask questions or signal a willingness to listen to their perspective. You find you can empathize better when you know more about their life history or current reality. They then are more likely to trust you as a human being.



Guess which approach leads to better communication and interpersonal harmony. When we understand people's history and life experiences, we are more likely to feel compassion and empathy. We can then tame our unconscious fear of people we perceive as "different". Because we are coming from a non-judgmental stance with others, they are more likely to reciprocate by not judging us.

As counselors at the County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (the EAP), we see firsthand the emotional pain that comes from being judged as "different" and/or "not OK". This happens with battling couples, squabbling coworkers, and tense manager-employee interactions. It happens when parents don't understand their teenagers and the teenagers don't understand their parents. When curiosity is encouraged, human relationships improve.

When we understand each other, we can then work our way to better interactions.

If you are struggling with enduring conflicts that don't get better, consider giving the Employee Assistance Program a call at (408) 241-7772 to schedule counseling appointments.

We offer family counseling (parent and teens), couple counseling, and peer employee conflict resolution services. Employees and eligible family members may be seen for up to five free counseling appointments.

The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confused and difficult for a time. Work performance may be negatively affected. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.



## COACH APPROACH Personal Mission Statements

Goals are important. They help motivate us to achieve our greatest potential. It's what makes so many of us write New Year's resolutions, hoping this will be the year we stick with it. While goals and resolutions are important, a personal mission statement can ground you throughout life.

### GOALS VERSUS MISSION STATEMENTS

Goals. Personal mission statement. Is it really just semantics? How do they differ? While realistic goals are typically linked to shorter time-frames, a mission statement considers larger, "big picture" ideas. A personal mission statement comprises our core beliefs and values, and to whom and what we feel connected. Long-term, legacy planning comes to mind, as one considers the type of impact they'd like to leave on this world. Answers can vary to include physical, emotional, financial, relational, or even career targets.

### WRITING A PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

If the term alone makes you feel nervous, rest assured. Drafting a personal mission statement isn't a pass or fail assignment. There's no law that says you have to get it right the first time. Personal mission statements will most likely change as you grow through different seasons of life. Consider these guidelines to get you started to developing your own mission statement.

- **Short** - Think about what matters most in your life. A mission statement should be a short summation; anything longer than a single sentence is too much. For example, "My passion and expertise in education drive me to inspire children in my community."
- **Summarize** - Consider these questions, and then look for the common theme.
  - o What's important to me?
  - o Where do I hope my life leads?
  - o What impact do I wish to leave?
- **Share** - We're best in community. Invite feedback about your personal mission statement by sharing it with your spouse, mentor, professors, and any other important people in your life.

Personal mission statements offer the framework needed to direct decision-making and minimize distractions. They allow us an outline to color in the beautiful details of life, rather than aimlessly wandering. When we're discouraged or tempted to stop short, a personal mission statement can be a mindfulness mantra to remember our purpose. Make 2018 the year you determine your life's direction. Writing a personal mission statement is a short-term goal worth keeping.



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