

The Truth About Living Together

Recently, college students were asked to talk about their aspirations concerning marriage and family. Most of the students said they planned to marry, but they wanted to be certain they were marrying the right person. During the discussion they were asked to talk about the best ways to prepare for a healthy marriage that will endure over a lifetime. The overwhelming majority of the class believed that living with someone before marrying him/her is the best way to know if you can make it in a marriage relationship. They were quite shocked to learn that living with someone rarely leads to lifelong marriage.

Statistics from the National Survey of Families and Households shows that out of 100 couples living together only 55 will actually get married. Out of the 55 couples, only 12 will be married a decade later.

Unfortunately, these students are among many in our society who operate under the assumption that living together is an easy way to “try out” a relationship before committing to marriage. Experts explain that living together is basically a pretend marriage and nothing like the real thing. Cohabiting couples tend to have attitudes like “I can leave any time” and “my money versus your money,” which are attitudes married couples usually don’t have. What’s missing is a vow of permanence.

If you are thinking about living with someone before you marry them, consider these common myths.

Myth: Sharing finances and expenses will make things easier on our relationship.

Fact: Just like any couple, disputes often center around money. Couples who live together have more financial issues to resolve. Conflicts arise over who is responsible for which bill and the rights one partner has to tell the other how to spend “their money.”

Myth: Marriage is just a piece of paper.

Fact: Legally, marriage is paperwork. Emotionally, physically, and spiritually, marriage is a contract of commitment. Viewing marriage as a legal arrangement strips it of its meaning and sets the relationship up for failure. If couples do not view marriage as a loving, committed relationship, divorce is almost inevitable.

Myth: Your sex life ends when you get married.

Fact: The level of sexual satisfaction is lower among couples who live together than for married couples. Couples who live together tend to be less faithful to their partners than married couples.

Myth: It’s only temporary.

Fact: Many people enter a cohabiting relationship hoping that they will be married soon, however, living together isn’t always a stepping-stone to marriage. Research from the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University tracking cohabiting couples over five to seven years reported that 21 percent still lived together without marrying

and 39 percent split up.

Myth: Living together is best if there are children involved.

Fact: The effect of cohabitation on children is significant. Children in these situations are at risk of emotional and social difficulties, performing poorly in school, having early premarital sex and having difficulty forming permanent emotional attachments in adulthood. If the man in the household is not the biological father, children are at greater risk of experiencing physical and sexual abuse.

After hearing the myths about living together, one student was brave enough to ask, “If living together isn’t the answer, what can you do to build a strong healthy relationship?”

Experts suggest that time, learning to communicate effectively and making marriage your goal are key. Time gives you an opportunity to see how your partner handles different situations that life throws at you: the stressful times, the joyous and rewarding times and the humdrum of everyday. If you can survive these life events with someone and still love them, then there is an excellent chance your relationship will last.