

What to Discuss before Getting Married



Premarital counseling is something mostly left to churches that require a certain number of sessions before the wedding. Oftentimes newly engaged couples don't proactively discuss issues that could lie ahead but the concepts discussed in premarital counseling need to be hashed out by every couple before the wedding planning begins.

"Nobody comes in because they want because they have a really good relationship and wants to make it better. Society doesn't look at it that way," said Donald Goodman, a family and couple therapist in Valencia. "My definition of a good relationship is a couple knowing its issues and knowing how to work on them."

Goodman says he rarely sees couples come in specifically for premarital counseling – but frequently sees married couples who are experiencing issues that should have been discussed before tying the knot.

"There's a honeymoon period that goes along with an engagement and the honeymoon period prevents couples from really accessing what the problems are in the relationship," Goodman said. "Once you start the wedding planning, then

it's all over. You're just not even going to be thinking about the issues you have. We're moving toward something that's really exciting so it's a great distraction."

The largest arenas that couples need to discuss before getting engaged or married are money, sex, kids, parenting,

in-laws, careers, how you spend your time and our future. In terms of time, Goodman said a lot of couples don't realize until later in the marriage how starting a family changes the way you allocate "You Time" and "Family Time." If you don't discuss your priorities in time early on, it could lead to people feeling like their losing the important "You Time" they value.

You don't need to hire a therapist to discuss these big topics, but it's something that you should set aside time for, Goodman said.

"One of the things that me and my wife did was we took a lot of walks together and that was our playing field," Goodman said. "We probably walked together 14-16 hours a week for a long time and had some heated discussions and issues came out and we decided how many kids we wanted and how we're going to spend our money."

These discussions don't necessarily need to feel forced, Goodman said – "Honey, let's grab a bottle of wine and talk about our in-laws" – but while you and your significant other are together, it would be good to set the tone by asking if there was anything they wanted to talk about. That helps segue into a conversation about one of the big areas.

If you're getting married tomorrow, then Goodman said he typically works with couples about four months after the wedding, when the honeymoon phase has started to wane.

"12 weeks before getting married, you're not going to be talking. It's going to be very sugarcoated," Goodman said. "It's not because you don't want to. We can't be real about our issues generally when we're feeling pretty excited about what the future holds."