

# Marriage

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## The Myths

A lot of people believe things about marriage that just aren't true. They are more 'myth' than fact. Here are some of the most popular.

### **Marriage Will Solve Everything**

Some people think that being married will change them, it will make them happier, and life will be perfect. This expectation is unrealistic.

*"When you start out, you naively think that marriage will be always wonderful and love will see you through, but marriage is tough and you do have to work at it at times."* Helen, married 23 years.

Marriage is a gift from God. However, it isn't always easy and requires constant effort, as you are both building something together. Just because you're facing something difficult, it doesn't necessarily mean that your marriage isn't working, or there's something wrong with you. Every marriage has its tough times.

Sometimes people get married with unresolved personal issues in themselves which they expect will change, or even disappear, by getting married. This is also unrealistic and needs addressing.

*"Grow up before you get married and ditch the ego, marriage is for grown-ups!"* Amanda, married 15 years.

### **It's All About the Wedding Day**

Your Wedding Day is important as it's the first day of your married life together. But it's also just that – the first of many days together. What comes after the Wedding Day is so much more important. You are building a life together.

Of course, you want your Wedding Day to go well. However, even if there are glitches (and there probably will be), the point of the Day is that *you'll be*

*married* and be able to live your lives together. Don't lose perspective. The French even have a saying that when it rains, it's a sign of a happy marriage!

*"It's definitely about the marriage, not the wedding", Alison, married 36 years.*

## **It Doesn't Matter if We Can't Communicate**

When a problem comes along, the couple's skill and willingness to listen and talk things through will determine how easily they can find a way through it.

Being able to talk things through in a relaxed, non-threatening way is the most important skill a couple can develop. Communication is everything.

*"We suggest the couple really discuss everything together, hopes, dreams, plans, siblings, in-laws, respective faiths, health etc." Alan and Elizabeth, married 36 years*

Some couples start off at a disadvantage. This may be because when they were growing up, they had dominant parents who decided things for them and so they never learned to problem solve through discussion.

It may also be that, growing up, a person has never been given the space or opportunity to talk about how they really think or feel. Because they are not used to talking in this way, they may now avoid it because they find it strange or fear they might not find the right words.

Some people who have never learned to listen and so they block or hijack the other person's attempt to express something.

Some people take longer than others to find the right words to express something.

Patience, the skill of not interrupting, and a willingness to listen is a life-saver.

## **Marriage Won't Change Me**

Couples can experience problems if one or both parties finds it hard to adapt to 'role change' and the altered responsibilities that go with it.

This happens...

- when a married man or woman carries on living, acting or spending money as if he or she were still single.
- When parents live for each other to the detriment of the children they have brought into the world.
- Another problem that can either be a 'role change' problem or an attempt to find affirmation is when a man or woman avoids his partner or family by spending extra time working whilst using the excuse that he/ she is doing it to provide for the family.

Role change involves negotiation and adjustment. Each couple will be different. Negotiation should always be respectful and fair.

### **We Don't Need to Share**

Another sensitive area for some couples is how they handle money. This can be an especially difficult topic for those people who find 'role change' problematic.

In Christian marriage a couple promise to each other "All that I have I share with you." What this means is that all their possessions, past saving and future income become jointly owned.

Some people feel their independence threatened by this idea- they regard their income as being their own personal property.

Some couples pool everything into the joint venture and each person to receives an equal amount of personal spending money from the joint funds every month.

Another issue that can cause difficulties is if one of the partners is a careful saver and the other is a spontaneous spender or an impulse shopper (i.e. a person whose spending pattern is related to their moods – e.g. comfort shopping or bi polar related issues).

Sometimes one person in the marriage is better at money management than the other. In which case irrespective of how things were done in the parent's marriage or culture, it makes sense for the better manager to handle the household bills and budget – but with the proviso that decisions are discussed and made jointly so the other person does not feel left out or diminished. Being made to feel diminished is one of the main causes of anger.

Sensible spending and good budgeting skills are important. Not every couple has these when they start out, but the sooner they are learned the better.

## **It's Just About Us Two**

When you get married, you become a unit together, stepping away from the unit you previously formed with your parent/s. However, there is also a new family you now belong to.

Navigating your new family takes skill, patience, diplomacy and sometimes just time. You've married into a culture where things are done differently.

*"Acceptance of another person's wider family is important. This is essentially what makes the other person who they are", Gaynor, married 24 years.*

Parents/In-laws need to know that they are still valued, needed and loved but they also need to be adult enough to 'let go'.

Some parents/in-laws can create problems by still expecting their child to be at their beck and call. They can find it hard to accept the fact that their child is now married and has a new role and a new set of priorities and loyalties.

This is made more difficult if the parent acts in either a dominant, manipulative, or passive aggressive way. The child then has to make difficult decisions. It is not easy for a child to decline requests or to create boundaries, the child's need to be loved and accepted by the parent can get in the way.

When parents/in-laws have problems adjusting to their own change of roles, the couple need to negotiate a way to stand together and to give affirmation whilst also creating sensible and respectful boundaries.

### **For discussion:**

- If you're about to get married, can you recognise any of these 'myths' you may have believed?
- If you're already married, can you see how any of these 'myths' have impacted your relationship?
- Is there anything you need to talk about together as a result of reading this?

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