



# Marriage Prep 101



*Helping Couples Create a Lifetime Together*

---

## **PREMARITAL EDUCATION COULD CUT DIVORCE RATE**

By Sharon Jayson - USA TODAY - June 22, 2006

More couples are getting premarital education, perhaps thinking it may give their new marriages divorce protection. And new research suggests they may well be right.

Premarital education "is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction, lower levels of destructive conflicts and higher levels of interpersonal commitment to spouses," says the study, published this spring in the *Journal of Family Psychology*. Based on a random phone survey of 3,344 adults in four states, it says couples who received premarital education had a 31% lower chance of divorce. The number of hours spent in premarital programs ranged from as little as a few hours to 20 hours. The median was eight hours.

Most religious denominations suggest that their engaged couples participate in such programs; Catholicism requires it. But now, others also are giving them a try.

"The reason this has become more important, at least culturally if not religiously, is that people are beginning to try and figure out ways to prevent divorce," says Deborah Caldwell, managing editor of *Beliefnet.com*, a multi-faith religion website.

Unlike premarital counseling, which involves the couple alone and may focus on their conflicts and trouble spots, premarital education takes place in a group; classes provide general relationship advice.

Because premarital education aims to lower the risk of divorce and identify problem areas before the wedding, experts suggest couples start such programs six months to a year out.

Scott Stanley, co-founder of a premarital and marital education program and a co-author of the journal study, says increased interest in premarital education follows a cultural trend "to be much more accepting of education as a way to improve one's ability to do life well." He is speaking this week at the Smart Marriages Conference in Atlanta.

His study surveyed adults in Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas in 2001. Only 7% of those married there during the 1930s and 1940s got premarital education, compared with 44% of those married since 1990.

Apparent benefits were the same across race, income and education, but there was at least one difference.

"It looks like everyone has the same benefit, but they don't have the same access," Stanley says.



# Marriage Prep 101



*Helping Couples Create a Lifetime Together*

---

William Doherty, a professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, is among those who want to improve that access. He has created a DVD designed to give prospective brides and grooms a dose of premarital education amid the logistics of their wedding planning. The two-hour mini-course is aimed at managing what Doherty calls the "people stress" of preparing for the big event.

Wedding planning advice abounds, from a plethora of books to websites and chat rooms that let brides-to-be vent about their soon-to-be in-laws or their own family issues. But Doherty says their advice is simplistic.

Marcy Twete, 22, of Minneapolis, and fiancé Matthew Harrington, 23, of New Richmond, Wis., were among a small group invited to attend a preview of Doherty's DVD session earlier this year.

Their July 29 wedding has prompted her to look at lots of books and wedding websites, but they don't tell brides much about the background issues related to family dynamics.

"It's all focused on flowers and pictures and everything else. Nobody takes into consideration what's going to happen to the family after the wedding is over," Twete says. "It really is about joining two families."