Proven Ways to Prevent Divorce

Six-out-of-ten new marriages taking place in Indiana are predicted to end in divorce. This breakdown of the family has been evident for the past fifty years. In fact, Professor Lawrence Stone, a family historian from Princeton University, has observed that, "the scale of marital breakdowns in the West since 1960 has no historical precedent that I know of. There has been nothing like it for the last 2,000 years." Pro-family groups have been warning Hoosiers of the societal consequences of the disintegration of marriage and worked for changes in public policies. However, individuals can have a significant societal impact one family at a time by strengthening their own marriages. The following is a list of a few basic items engaged or married couples can follow to help prevent a divorce.



Avoid Trial Marriages

In today's divorce culture, cohabitation has become a common testing ground for traditional marriage. Record numbers of couples who have not married are currently living together in America. This growth in cohabitation represents a 600 percent increase since 1970.

Many observers have concluded - that the widespread practice of "living together" is a rejection of traditional marriage. However, over 90 percent of cohabitors report that they plan to marry someone at some point in their lives. Often these couples view their cohabitation as a "trial marriage" or a testing ground prior to marriage.

Numerous studies have found that couples who cohabit prior to marriage have significantly higher rates of divorce. According to these studies, the rates of divorce are 50 to 100 percent higher than couples who did not cohabit prior to marriage. These same studies also find that the rate of domestic violence is fives times higher in cohabiting households than their married counterparts.

Practice Abstinence

Beyond preventing out-of-wedlock births and protection from sexually transmitted diseases, there are other reasons for confining sexual activity to the boundaries of the marital relationship. Research indicates that people who engage in premarital sexual activity are less likely to remain faithful to their wedding vows. In his report *Faithful Attraction* University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Greeley found that "premarital sex with someone other than the intended spouse correlates with marital infidelity." In his study, only 3 percent of spouses who did not engage in premarital sex were unfaithful in marriage.

Not surprisingly, research from the University of Maryland and the *National Center for Health Statistics* finds that engagement in premarital sex is connected with a "considerably higher risk" of divorce.

Attend Church

Although Indiana's divorce epidemic touches all families, there is a group which has a greater protection from the divorce monster. According to the National Survey of Family Growth sponsored by

the *National Institute of Child Development,* couples who are active in practicing their faith are more than twice as likely to stay married as the non-religious. A similar study of 600 couples by Dr. James Dobson, author of the book Love for a Lifetime, reported that a couple who prays together regularly, "has a distinct advantage over the family with no faith."

Attend a Retreat

All relationships including marriages go through highs and lows. The good news is that virtually every marriage can be strengthened by attending a marriage enrichment weekend or retreat. One popular conference is the *Marriage Encounter* weekend which was created in 1965. Thirty academic studies involving interviews of couples before and after attending the conference have found that 80 to 90 percent of couples describe themselves as "falling back in love with their spouse."

A similar weekend is called *A Weekend to Remember* by the Family Life Ministries of Campus Crusade For Christ. Each year more than 22,000 couples attend this conference.

Look for Warning Signs

Relationships between men and women tend to go through phases which are predictable. Successful couples recognize these changes and react (invest) in a positive way which strengthens the marriage.

Warning signs of trouble often reveal themselves at different stages. Certain signs in a marriage relationship can be an alert to potential conflict and the possibility of divorce. These signs include:

The number and frequency of arguments; The tendency of one (or both) partners to be overtly critical of the other; A sudden or growing financial difficulty; A loss of respect for oneself or the other partner.

When warning signs begin to surface, the successful couple will find ways to deal with them in positive, constructive methods sometimes even seeking outside help.

Say "No" to Divorce

Modern culture has a dim view of lasting marriage. America has rapidly gone from a country in which the vast majority of our grandparents embraced marriage as a permanent relationship to a generation who scarcely recognizes any type of marital commitment. "Till death do us part," has been replaced by "As long as I'm happy."

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Successful marriages do not permit the possibility of divorce to enter their vocabulary or even their thinking. Divorce is seldom the right answer to a troubled marriage. Divorced adults suffer from significantly higher rates of physical, emotional and mental maladies and if they remarry, they can have a 70 percent risk of another divorce. Studies also show that kids can suffer for a lifetime when parents divorce.

Most people assume, wrongly, that it is impossible to improve a bad marriage. There are numerous programs available to help couples withstand the difficult times that most marriages will face. If you would like to learn about some of these programs, or need a referral for marital counseling, contact your local church, AFA of Indiana or Focus on the Family.