



**Intraspectus Learning Series**

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## **The Benefits Of Pre-Marital Counseling**

### ***The Bad News***

We have all been told that one out of every two marriages end in divorce. One of the biggest problems we face is the lack of positive role models for healthy relationships. Sometimes it may not be a question of how hard one tries to nurture or salvage a marriage – it could be the manner in which you try that is the road block.

### ***Why Disney Is Bad For You***

The Prince Charming and Cinderella archetypes are so pervasive in our culture that they tend to form permanent impressions of “normal” relationships in our psyche. As a consequence, many of us go through our lives chronically dissatisfied because we were not swooped up by a charming prince or didn’t awaken the beauty with a kiss.

If these stories served only to remind us to strive for our best, and be romantic in our relationships, they would serve us all well. However, they also develop deep-seated and unrealistic images about what to expect in our relationships. Those who have only dysfunctional relationships from which to gauge their relationships are even more prone to rely on the media for guidance.

### ***Nature & Nurture***

Both nature and nurture play a part in our relationships. Once you decide to be in a relationship, habits learned and innate traits come to the surface and over time can breed conflict. Conflict itself does not have to be unhealthy. It is a natural part of two people sharing their lives together. When you think about how hard it is for one person to move about in this complex world, bringing together two lives into a marriage is infinitely more complicated. This is why having a meaningful dialogue to set a solid foundation is so vital.

### ***Improving The Odds***

More planning typically goes into the wedding day than into the marriage itself. There is nothing wrong with making the big day as special as possible, or as perfect as you have dreamed. It is important to use the same amount of energy and time to ensure the relationship succeeds. One way to improve the odds is with advanced and ongoing planning in conjunction with developing good conflict resolution and communication skills. Below is a list of issues for you and your partner to openly discuss over a relaxed and quiet setting. It is important that enough time is allotted before walking down the aisle. As a minimum, make sure you understand each other’s viewpoints, which may be different.

1. Children or no children?

2. Careers – in a mobile and ever competitive global work environment, what are each of your career plans? Will one person's career take precedent?
3. Moving or not moving? Does one person wish to move all over the world, and the other to live in the family neighborhood?
4. What will your financial arrangements be? Will you do combined or separate finances? Which arrangement is best for you? What are your financial goals? Define enough.
5. Religion. This can be a big issue for couples, particularly if you both have strong convictions, religious, denominational or otherwise. How do kids fit into such plans?
6. How will conflicts be resolved? Many things in life have rules to govern conflict, everything from football to the latest reality show. Developing some ground rules and conflict management systems appropriate for your relationship is time WELL spent.
7. What will you do when the above list of "agreements" change for the one or both of you? How will your relationship handle and plan for growth, stagnation or change?

### ***Why Planning Does Not Mean The Death Of Romance***

All this planning can seem like the death of romance. Romance does a good job of bringing people together and keeping the chemistry alive. However, it hasn't been doing enough to keep couples together. Planning can actually reduce stress and conflict in a relationship, leaving more time for romance and growth.

### ***When Outside Help Can Make A Difference***

Open dialogues such as those proposed above can be very difficult for couples particularly if dysfunctional or disruptive ways of relating already exist. If at least one person in the relationship procrastinates or avoids talking about these issues, then pre-marital counseling may be worthwhile. It can be a forum where the focus is on the relationship and help you broach difficult questions, such as: Should you go forward with the wedding? Your partner does not agree with the way you handle your debt – what should you two do? You feel that you are giving in too much – is there a better way to make decisions? If these questions resonate with you, a premarital therapist can be a valuable resource for any couple trying to get off on the right foot before the journey of marriage begins.