

# Unit 2: Premarital Counseling

## *Preparing for the Wedding Day*

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# Outline

- The Premarital Counseling Process
- Goals of Premarital Counseling
- The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)
- Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE)
- Premarital Counseling Inventory
- Preparing for the Wedding Day
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# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The overall objectives of pre-marital counseling are:
  1. To assess the strengths and challenges of the couple's relationship,
  2. To provide interventions tailored to the specific needs of the partners and the relationship, and
  3. To equip the couple with tools that may help them in avoiding common pitfalls of long-term romantic relationships.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- Premarital counseling is targeted toward couples in committed relationships who are planning to officially *"tie the knot"* sometime in the future.
- The counseling process often takes place before their wedding and *may* continue after whenever necessary.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The process of counseling is divided into **3 phases**:
  1. The assessment phase
  2. The working phase
  3. The termination phase.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

## ■ **The Assessment Phase:**

- This is the initial phase where the couple and the Counselor get to know each other.
- After the routine introductions, the Counselor will ask some key questions to the couple that will help determine where the couple are as individuals and what the nature of their relationship with each other.
- Thereafter, the Counselor will decide (in consultation with the couple & based on their expectations) the path to move forward.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  - Couples seeking premarital counseling are divided into 3 groups:
    1. Those with no real conflict or problems,
    2. Those experiencing difficulty or conflict in their relationship, and
    3. Those planning to remarry.
  - While the pastoral premarital counseling caters primarily to the first group, the second and third group are serviced primarily in a clinical setting through trained clinical professionals or physicians.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  - One of the issues that a premarital counselor has to settle is whether the counseling is going to be *individual, concurrent, conjoint*, or, some combination of all three.
  - Premarital counseling can follow this pattern: *individual → concurrent → conjoint*
  - Conjoint counseling is the ideal counseling situation!



# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  - Conjoint Premarital Counseling is *encouraged* for the following reasons:
    1. It suggests to the couple that the counselor values their relationship along with them as individuals,
    2. It allows the counselor to see how the couple interacts and observe their relationship

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  - Conjoint Premarital Counseling is *encouraged* for the following reasons:
    3. By seeing both people together, the counselor heightens the bilateralism of their relationship. (*Bilateralism means that marriage is a two-way street, a quid-pro-quo experience*).
    4. Finally, the conjoint couple format underscores that the counselor does not want to be a keeper of secrets – and both individuals should be prepared to disclose their secrets to each other before the marriage takes place.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  - After deciding on the type of premarital counseling, the following have to be decided after discussion with the couple/parents:
    1. *The number and length of the sessions:* A comprehensive & detailed premarital counseling will involve 6-7 sessions, each session between 1-2 hours. All areas - theological, relationship, and wedding specifics (for clergy) – need to be covered.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- The Assessment Phase (cont....):
  2. *The counseling fees charged for the couple:*  
Suggested charges in USA is about \$50-60/session.  
*Avoid counseling for free.*
  3. *The use of printed materials:* You, as the counselor can make use of the Bible, marriage enrichment books, customized couple's workbook, pamphlets or other materials to aid in the counseling process (free/charged). You may create a brochure describing the nature of the premarital process, fees, wedding mechanism details, etc. and give to the couple in advance.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

## ■ **The Working Phase:**

- This phase is specifically tailored to each couple and relationship needs. During this phase, the counselor will discuss the assessment details with the couple.
- By the end of this phase couples should feel more secure in the relationship and that any doubts that they may have had about officially committing to the relationship, have been resolved.
- This phase is the longest of the three and may last anywhere between 3-5 sessions.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

## ■ **The Termination Phase:**

- This is the last phase of pre-marital counseling, where new learning, skills and understandings are consolidated and anchored in the couple.
- It is at this time that a plan for on-going care and nurture of the relationship is put together for the couple.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

- **Are There Any Risks to Premarital Counseling?**
  - Like in any process of counseling, while uncovering private issues (*such as past/present hurts, disappointments, past trauma or personal challenges*) difficult feelings may arise. In such cases, the premarital counselor should help partners process their feelings in a safe and empathic environment.

# The Premarital Counseling Process

## ■ Are There Any Risks to Premarital Counseling?

- Another risk (*rare but may happen*) is that one or both partners may realize, through the process of counseling that they do not wish to make a long-term commitment to the relationship and may even choose to break their relationship. In such rare cases, the counselor should assist in processing the partners' feelings and in terminating the relationship in the most amicable way possible. This *may* happen primarily to less than 5% of couples, usually when the couple had serious doubts about their relationship to begin with.



# Goals of Premarital Counseling

- The conjoint premarital counseling has primarily *seven goals* to accomplish, listed below:
  1. ***Clarification of Self:*** During the counseling process, each partner establishes the “I” position. The process is designed to help each person sketch out his/her thoughts, feelings, beliefs and fantasies. By the time the sessions come to a close, each person’s identity will have become clearer to all those involved.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

- 2. Clarification of Other:* As the counseling process helps to clarify each person in terms of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and fantasies, the partner gains a clearer picture of the person with whom they are in a relationship and whom they are going to marry. Each person gains a clearer picture of the uniqueness of the other's personality.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

- 3. *Binding Anxiety:*** Couples moving toward the wedding are frequently anxious concerning different matters (e.g. if wedding will go smoothly, if he/she is '*good enough*' for partner, etc.). By taking a methodical look at their relationship through the premarital counseling process, the couple gets a sense of the nature of the relationship, and gains some skills for growth. In pastoral counseling sessions, the couple also understands the basic mechanics of the wedding, which helps to relieve wedding anxiety.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

4. *Building Adventure:* The counseling process leads the couple into an adventure as it explores the nature of their relationship in depth. The counselor can add to the excitement through emphasizing their areas of strength and compatibility with each other.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

5. **Communication:** The premarital counseling process will help improve communication in two ways:

**First**, it will help each person become more aware of his or her own thoughts, feelings and actions, which will teach them to communicate more effectively.

**Second**, the process will introduce or remind the couple of a language that is unique to their relationship.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

6. *Observation and Prediction:* Part of the pre-wedding counseling process includes making observations about patterns or dynamics in the relationship that could cause difficulty or conflict. This feedback serves as a warning for couples and it enables them to interpret difficulties more easily when it finally appears in their married life. The predictions also takes away the sting of surprise out of the possible conflict.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

- 7. *Overcoming Inhibitions:* One of the most important goals of the premarital counseling is to help the couple talk about specific areas of their relationship that they had not or, could not talk about before.
- These seven goals help you (the premarital counselor) to apply a facilitative approach to your counseling process.

# Goals of Premarital Counseling

- As a counselor, you can present these goals to the couple during the first session. These aims can be used as outcome goals in the counseling process.
- You can also review these goals at the start of each session to monitor the progress of your premarital counseling.



## The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- We will now present a conjoint premarital counseling model that will give the couple an opportunity to look at their relationship, and to expand their thinking about their relationship and their lives together.
- This methodology will provide the counselor a sense of direction and a clear understanding of the process.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- **Outline of a Premarital Counseling Model:**
  1. **Introduction** (getting acquainted, goals, scriptural review/expectations, etc.)...*session 1.*
  2. **Dynamic Relationship History (DRH):** The counselor evaluates the couple's relationship in detail...*session 1.*
  3. **Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE):** The counselor examines the nature and characteristics of the partners' family of origin. This exploration will help to clarify the parental model of marriage...*session 1.*

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- 4. *Parents Attend a Session (Optional):***  
*This segment can be an alternate conclusion to #3. Here, the parents of bride and groom are invited into the end of the session to say goodbye to their children, to welcome the new couple into their family & allow the parents to pass on familial wisdom...end of session 1.*

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

## 5. **PREPARE/ENRICH Premarital Inventory:**

- During the first session, the counselor encourages the couple to take the comprehensive survey individually without consulting with one another.
- The results of the survey reflects the truth analysis of their perception, views and opinions concerning their relationship.
- The counselor (a certified PREPARE/ENRICH Facilitator) will get a concise Couple's Report and a comprehensive Facilitator's Report.
- As the next step, the couple meets with their certified facilitator for several interpretation and feedback sessions (sessions 2-6).

## 6. **Wedding Preparation:** The Pastoral Counselor explains the mechanics of the wedding & theological expectations...session 7

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH) is a structured way of looking at a relationship's history from the time the couple first met up to the wedding.
- The purpose is to help the couple become aware of how they behave with each other, how they effect each other, and what patterns they have already established.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- DRH is a structured initial interview applied exclusively to the premarital relationship.
- The couple (psychologically speaking) is already married, so accept that relationship & go from there.
- Through DRH, the counselor takes the couple as they are & expands their understanding of the relationship.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- Think of the couple's relationship as the coming together of two rivers. The counseling process is an attempt to influence the enhanced river's course.
  - DRH is a way of structuring information that is useful to both the couple and the counselor.
  - DRH heightens awareness of couple's interactional patterns as they recognize and understand their impact more fully.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- DRH creates a sense of movement in the couple's lives as they reflect on their past as they started out single, entered into a relationship, and finally moved toward marriage.
- DRH examines the relationship dynamics in the couple's level.
- By using the DHR, the counselor models questioning for the couple, giving each the needed information about the other person.



# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- The DHR through active questioning is intended to accomplish two tasks: *expand the couple's awareness about each other*, and *expand the couple's thinking process about their relationship*.
- The DHR is intended to help the couple take responsibility for their individual lives, for their lives together, and for the joys and problems they create. The couple can no longer blame parents or anyone else for their lives.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- The task of the counselor is to promote the passage from childhood to adulthood and encourage responsibility for their own actions.
- Thus, DRH is a *chronological exploration* of the couple's relationship through *dyadic questioning* (asking one partner question about the other partner), keeping our *focus systemic* and making the couple *think rationally*.

# The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)

- The dyadic questioning helps us to elicit feedback about *similarity* and *dissimilarity* in the couple, gather information about the *couple's interaction*, and elicit information about *nodal events* that have caused conflict for the couple.
- It is important for the counselor to *write down* what is being said rather than interpretations of it. It will also be beneficial to write down the events or happenings on a writing board that is large enough to be read in a distance by the couple.

# Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE)

- Parents' Model for Marriage:
  - Parents are the first human beings that children know – father is the first male and mother is the first female. Also parents are the first husband-wife team that we know. From Father, we know what *'being a husband'* is all about. From mother, we know what *'being a wife'* is all about.
  - We learn from parents marital expectations, marital attitudes and marital behavior patterns. Parents are powerful models!

# Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE)

- Parents' Model for Marriage:
  - When conflicts exist in parental marriage, children take one of two courses. *On one hand*, some children repeat the pattern of their parental marriage and attempt to solve the problems for themselves and for their parents. *On the other hand*, some children try to avoid the conflicts of their parents' marriage by behaving in exactly the opposite ways. Sometimes that works, but other times they create opposite problems.

# Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE)

- Parents' Model for Marriage:
  - Since people are more comfortable to talk about themselves than about the details of their family of origin, FOE comes only after DRH that acquaints the counselor with the couple.
  - In the family-of-origin exploration, the purpose of the premarital counselor is not only to look at and trace the parental models that a man and a woman brings to a relationship, but also to trace how these models influence their behavior with each other.

# Family-of-Origin Exploration (FOE)

- Parents' Model for Marriage:
  - Through FOE, we seek to heighten the couple's awareness of their parental models. The counselor should stress the parental modeling to the couple.
  - The FOE can be divided into *seven sections*: (1) siblings as individuals, (2) sibling interactions, (3) parent-child interactions, (4) husband-wife interactions, (5) family interactional styles, (6) parental models, and (7) the wrap-up. (*Details outside course preview*)

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- **Using an Online Assessment Inventory:**
  - PREPARE/ENRICH is a relationship inventory and couples assessment tool that is administered as an online survey.
  - Both individuals take this survey separately and it helps to identify the unique strengths and potential growth areas of their premarital relationship.



# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- PREPARE/ENRICH is a sophisticated instrument that must be then interpreted by a trained Facilitator. Based on the couple's assessment results, a trained facilitator provides 2-6 feedback sessions in which the facilitator helps the couple discuss and understand their results as they are taught proven relationship skills.
- The PREPARE/ENRICH assessment inventory helps couples:
  - Explore strength and growth areas
  - Strengthen communication skills
  - Identify and manage major stressors
  - Resolve conflict using the Ten Step Model

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- The PREPARE/ENRICH Program helps couples (cont....):
  - Develop a more balanced relationship
  - Explore family of origin issues
  - Discuss financial planning and budgeting
  - Establish personal, couple and family goals
  - Understand and appreciate personality differences

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- What relationship areas are assessed by the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventory?
  - 12 Relationship Scales -- communication, conflict resolution, roles, sexuality, finances, spiritual beliefs and more
  - 5 SCOPE Personality Scales
  - 4 Couple and Family Scales -- based on the Circumplex Model
  - 4 Relationship Dynamic Scales
  - 30 Customized Scales

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- Is the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory valid & reliable?
  - An important strength of the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory is their strong psychometric properties. High levels of reliability and validity have been found for each instrument, making them valuable tools for research as well as clinical use.
  - National Norms based on over 500,000 couples
  - High Levels of Validity and Reliability in that it discriminates premarital couples that get divorced from those that are happily married with about 80-85% accuracy. Reliability is high (alpha reliability of .80 - .85).

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# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- **Contents of the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventory:**

1. **Couple Typology (Strength and Growth Areas)**
2. **Relationship Dynamics**
3. **Personal Stress Profile**
4. **Couple Map**
5. **Family Map**
6. **SCOPE Personality**

- **Couple Typology:** The couple's typology is determined in the following **nine** areas of interest:

1. **Communication** *(the ability to share feelings and understand each other)*
2. **Conflict Resolution** *(the ability to discuss and resolve differences)*

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Couple Typology:

3. **Partner Style & Habits** *(the ability to appreciate each other's personality & habits)*
4. **Financial Management** *(the level of agreement on budget and financial matters)*
5. **Leisure Activities** *(the ability to maintain a good balance of activities together and apart)*
6. **Sexuality and Affection** *(the level of comfort in discussing and agreeing concerning sexual issues and affection)*
7. **Family and Friends** *(the level of comfort with partner's relationships with relatives and friends)*
8. **Relationship Roles** *(the level of agreement in sharing decision-making and responsibilities)*
9. **Spiritual Beliefs** *(the level of agreement in religious values and beliefs)*

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Couple Typology:

- Based on the responses, the counselor determines the couple's relationship strength or the possible growth areas in each of the nine areas of interest.
- The Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) is categorized as follows:
  1. *High* Couple Agreement (PCA = 80-100%)
  2. *Moderately High* Couple Agreement (PCA = 50-70%)
  3. *Moderately Low* Couple Agreement (PCA = 30-40%)
  4. *Low* Couple Agreement (PCA = 0-20%)
- While *High* Couple Agreement shows *relationship strengths*, *Moderately High* Couple Agreement show *possible relationship strengths*, *Moderately Low* Couple Agreement show *possible growth areas* & *Low* Couple Agreement show *definite growth areas needed* for the couple.

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Couple Typology:

- PREPARE/ENRICH categorizes couple relationships into one of five common relational patterns:
  1. **Vitalized** couples are typically most satisfied with their relationship, skilled in communication and conflict resolution.
  2. **Harmonious** couples also enjoy high levels of satisfaction across most areas of their relationships.
  3. **Conventional** couples are most often committed to one another, but not as skilled in communication or conflict resolution.
  4. **Conflicted** couples have a lower level of satisfaction and often struggle with many areas of their relationship.
  5. **Devitalized** couples have the lowest levels of satisfaction and have growth areas in almost all aspects of their relationships.



# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Relationship Dynamics:

- Relationship Dynamics focuses on four different areas as follows:
  1. **Assertiveness** (this is the ability to express one's feelings and ask for what one wants)
  2. **Self Confidence** (this focuses on how good one feels about oneself and their ability to accomplish what they want in life)
  3. **Avoidance** (this is the tendency to minimize issues and reluctance to deal with issues directly)
  4. **Partner Dominance** (this focuses on how much one feels controlled or dominated by their partner)
- Relationship Dynamics scores each of the partners based on their responses in the following levels: Very Low, Low, Average, High & Very High.

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Personal Stress Profile:

- *“Stress either begins or ends up in a relationship”*
- The **Personal Stress Profile** examines each individual's personal stress level over the last year.
- The PREPARE/ENRICH inventory incorporates a **25-item stress checklist** chosen from a list of 50 personal stressors faced by most individuals in our modern culture.
- Stressors are external events which cause an emotional or physical reaction. The impact of the event depends on whether one views the event as positive or negative.
- There are two ways to cope with stress: either eliminate the stressor or, change one's reaction to stress.
- Key resources for coping with stress include healthy communication, conflict resolution, flexibility and closeness.

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ **Couple Map:**

- The Couple Map is drawn between two variables: **Couple Closeness** and **Couple Flexibility**.
- **Couple Closeness** is defined as the emotional closeness one feels towards their partner. On this dimension, relationships can range from Disconnected, Somewhat Connected, Connected, Very Connected and Overly Connected.
- **Couple Flexibility** is defined as the ability to adjust to changes in roles and leadership in response to life's demands. On this dimension, relationships can range from Inflexible, Somewhat Flexible, Flexible, Very Flexible and Overly Flexible.
- For the counselor, it will be helpful to discuss what is positive about the current levels of closeness and flexibility. It can be also helpful to discuss any desired changes (increases or decreases) in closeness and flexibility.

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ Family Map:

- The Family Map is drawn between two variables: **Family Closeness** and **Family Flexibility**.
- **Family Closeness** is defined as the emotional closeness one felt growing up in their family of origin. On this dimension, family relationships can range from Disconnected, Somewhat Connected, Connected, Very Connected and Overly Connected.
- **Family Flexibility** is defined as a family's ability to adjust to changes in roles, leadership and discipline. On this dimension, family relationships can range from Inflexible, Somewhat Flexible, Flexible, Very Flexible and Overly Flexible.
- The counselor should review family of origin closeness/flexibility results & discuss with actual examples such as celebrating a life event (e.g. birthday) or handling discipline. *What does each person want to bring from their family into the current relationship & what does he/she want to leave behind?*

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

- **SCOPE Personality:**
  - The **SCOPE Personality** assessment consists of **five dimensions** based on the **Five Factor Model of Personality: Social (S), Change (C), Organized (O), Pleasing (P) and Emotionally (E) Steady**. Individuals can score *Low, Average* or *High* on each of the Social dimensions.

# Premarital Counseling Inventory

## ■ SCOPE Personality:

- **Social (S)** is the trait that reflects preference for, and behavior in social situations.
- **Change (C)** is the trait that reflects openness to change, flexibility, and interest in new experiences.
- **Organized (O)** is the trait that reflects how organized and persistent a person is in their daily life and work. It also reflects persistence in pursuing goals.
- **Pleasing (P)** is the trait that reflects how considerate and cooperative one is in their interactions with others.
- **Emotionally (E) Steady** is the trait that reflects the tendency to stay relaxed and calm even when faced with stress, versus those who are more reactive to stress in their life.

# Preparing for the Wedding Day

- This is the *final part* of the premarital counseling process
- This part of counseling is more focused on the special role and task of clergy in the wedding itself.
- However, the information presented will be useful to the non-clergy counselor in heightening awareness of religious issues and topics.
- It is *assumed* that clergy will routinely discuss with the couple the mechanics of the wedding and reception, the meaning of various parts of the wedding service, and any other liturgical considerations.
- The Premarital Counselor/Pastor can integrate theological issues into the counseling process itself.

# Preparing for the Wedding Day

- As a counselor, you should focus on the couple and help them to become aware of the following:
  1. Each person's religious belief system
  2. Similarities/Differences in their religious value system
  3. Each person's practice of their faith
  4. Similarities/Differences in their religious practices
  5. Their future practices regarding their religious practices
- This heightens each partner's awareness of the other person's uniqueness, enhance their enjoyment of the values/practices they share, increase their respect for each other's beliefs and enables them to plan ahead for practicing them in the future.
- The counselor should explore the area of religion and religious practices in the DRH review, as well as explore the parent's religious orientation/practices and their models in the FOE review.



# Preparing for the Wedding Day

- When partners have pronounced differences, the DRH & FOE sections should help them appreciate those differences.
- The clergy counselor can help the couple develop respect for their differences and begin to negotiate a resolution to any conflict these differences produce.

# Preparing for the Wedding Day

- It is good to note the following for premarital counseling:
  - Focus on the couple, not the religious institution where they are coming from or going to.
  - The overall purpose of counseling is to explore and enhance the new relationship – this is the primary focus.
  - The DRH & FOE have a deeply theological task – to consolidate God’s initial purpose for this relationship: *“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him”* (Gen. 2:18). The word *“helper”* in the original Hebrew means: *“another person to live alongside him”*. They will have a bond greater than each has with his/her parents. Premarital counseling will ultimately focus on that goal.

# Q & A



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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