

## How do I help someone... ... develop a positive relationship in marriage?



### Introduction

Marriage was designed by God to provide a partnership where men and women might work closely together to imitate Christ by following his example. **A Godly marriage is characterised by self-sacrifice** where each party considers the other better than themselves and seeks ways to please and support their partner. This can mean subsuming our own wants to better serve our partner. Differences of opinion about a range of matters is usual in a marriage but only become problems if they come to be the focus of the relationship by remaining unresolved.

If we are privileged to be asked to assist people having challenges in their relationship it must be **done in a sensitive and caring manner** ensuring their confidentiality is respected. We must bear in mind, however, it is unlikely that we are trained professionals and some issues couples face need specialised assistance. **Good intentions are no substitute for training and experience** and so we should be very careful about what we say especially where any form of abusive behaviour is present.

To suggest a couple seeks professional support could well provide them with solutions to their difficulties. If one or both regard such a step as an admission of failure we can reframe their concerns by asking them to see it not as an admission of failure but a statement of one's desire to have their marriage succeed. You might recommend the couple consult their doctor and have a mental health plan developed which could include visits to a psychologist if you believe support beyond your limited scope is needed.

### Assess and Assist if there is a Crisis

Conflict as opposed to disagreement, can take over one's life. **A person experiencing physical and/or psychological violence should not remain in harm's way.** If a partner uses psychological and/or physical violence to dominate the other person, this can become dangerous to physical,

psychological and spiritual health. Tactics used by abusers include isolating, blaming, using degrading language, and economic, physical, and sexual abuse. Few of us have the training to help in such situations and professional assistance in such cases is very important.

To assist a person in immediate danger, it might be necessary to ask if they have considered leaving the relationship. **This is a valid question** and should be discussed if a person and/or their children are in danger of hurt through ongoing violence. It can, however, be difficult for people to leave an abusive relationship, and in some cases, attempting to do so can be fatal. Again, few of us have the training to help in such situations so professional assistance is very important.

## Respectful Communication

It is important for couples to understand and practise techniques that **enhance communication and problem solving**. A key to implementing such techniques is understanding oneself and the reasons we react in certain ways then to identify what is likely to disturb or even antagonise us. Studies into violence suggest that insecurity, feelings of inadequacy and jealousy are strong motivators that can lead to extreme behaviour. Again, professional help should be sought in such situations.

Effective communication and conflict resolution skills are important to a positive partnership. You might suggest couples practise:

- Careful listening to what the other person is saying.
- Not interrupting.
- Using reflective responses such as: “If I am understanding you correctly you are saying...”
- Controlling their emotions,
- Not shouting, clenching the fists, standing too close, pacing the room, sighing, turning away and using ridicule or threats.
- Avoiding global statements such as, “you are always angry, you never help with the children.”
- Do not minimise the other’s concerns. Statements such as “You’ll feel better tomorrow.” “I can’t see why that would worry you, it doesn’t worry me.” “You’ll get over it.”

If we are going to assist people with relationship difficulties it is important not to use judgemental language. It will not help in either the short or long term if you appear to take sides no matter how horrified you might feel about the person’s situation. Also remember you are hearing only one side of an issue. Taking sides in a marriage conflict makes it almost impossible to provide real assistance as trust is immediately compromised with the other person.

## The Power of Prayer

Have the couple consider the power of prayer. **Praying both individually and together can be the key to enhancing a relationship**. Have them remember the vows they made before God at their wedding and thank Him that he has brought them together. Suggest they thank God for His presence in their lives and where their lives are better for believing in Him. This can be a very positive experience and help to order thoughts and find words that can be used in later discussions.

## Life’s Demands

The demands of work appear to be increasing and people can feel there is less and less time to devote to the family. This can cause resentment on the part of one’s partner if they feel they are shouldering a large part of family responsibilities. It is important that sensitive discussions be

conducted to ensure responsibilities in the home are allocated in an equitable fashion and then diligently carried out. **A household that functions smoothly provides security for members of the family;** each knows what is expected of them and are assured that others will conduct themselves in ways that enhance the welfare of all members. You might suggest the couple review the range of responsibilities in the household and even make a list of what needs to be done from the mundane such as taking out the garbage to far more essential tasks such as who gets up at night when the baby cries. You might suggest the couple develop timelines as to when some task should be completed. Developing agreed expectations can provide greater stability to the household.

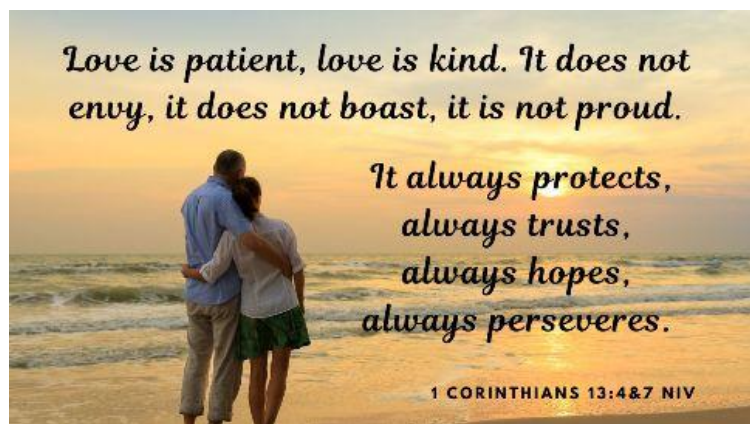
## Unfaithfulness in marriage

**Unfaithfulness can take many forms and not necessarily be sexual in nature.** One's partner deserves affectionate attention but to allow people outside the immediate family to take priority is a form of infidelity. Work, hobbies, sport indeed anything that takes priority over one's relationship with a partner is a form of infidelity. A topic for discussion might be the time spent at work and in pursuits beyond the home and how each feels about the other's activities. You might suggest the couple discuss how each feels about their personal relationship and programmes time when they can be together, to eat out, or take a short break away or something as simple as regular walking together in a local park.

## Resources and Further Reading

### *The Pre-Marriage Resource Book.*

Many couples have been given a copy of this book by their celebrant to help prepare for marriage. A review of its contents and reflection on the answers each gave to the discussion questions can remind us of what a good marriage is and how to maintain and enhance our relationship.



Another great resource is *The Marriage Enrichment Program*. This course is not just for people with significant problems but for any couple wishing to enhance their relationship. The course is run from time-to-time often being led by Christadelphian marriage celebrants and has been reported by people who have attended as being of benefit. To find out when the next course is to run contact a marriage celebrant in your local area. It can be worthwhile to get a group of friends to suggest to celebrants that it's time to run the course again!

If you have already been to a **Marriage Enrichment Program** it is useful to review the Guest manual you received as part of the course.

It never hurts to do the course for a second or even a third time as relationships change over time and different issues arise or old issues can remain to be solved.

*For Better or For Worse* Mark Vincent; Christadelphian 2015

*The First Years are Forever* Ed Wheat; Koorong Bookshop

*That We might Be One* Robert and Sharon Prins; available from Sister [CBandLagents@gmail.com](mailto:CBandLagents@gmail.com)

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*Steps to True Marriage* Harry Tennant; Christadelphian Office

*Family Life in the Lord* Don and Ellen Styles; Christadelphian Scripture Study Service

*The Marriage Checkup* H. Norman Wright; Koorong Bookshop

*The Marriage you've Always Wanted* Gary Chapman; Koorong Bookshop

*The 10 Commandments of Marriage* Ed Young; Koorong Bookshop

*The Five Love Languages* Gary Chapman; Koorong Bookshop

