

Ten Ways To Improve Your Chances for a Good Marriage After Cohabitation

By Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller

Some couples who live together don't want to get married, and some (like gay and lesbian couples) are prevented from marrying. But if lifelong marriage is your goal, as it is for the majority of male-female couples who move in together, here are our ten recommendations for how to increase the chances that your marriage will be a success.

1. Make the decision to live with a sweetie slowly, seriously, and with great care.
2. Before you move in together, be very clear about what you expect. Do you both definitely plan to get married? Do neither of you want to get married? Do you see cohabitation as a trial that will help you decide? You should both have a clear sense of what moving in together means to each of you.
3. Keep your expectations reasonable. Living together will not magically transform an "I'll never get married" guy into one who proposes on one knee. Sharing a kitchen and bedroom will not sweeten a volatile relationship. Live together because your relationship is going well, not to try to make it better.
4. Similarly, don't marry your cohabiting partner because you hope marriage will change her. If you don't like what you see in an unmarried significant other, you definitely won't like it in a spouse.
5. Define the amount of time you'll cohabit. One way is to get engaged and set a wedding date before you move in together. Another possibility is to set a future date (six months, one year?) at which time you both promise to have another serious conversation about marriage and make a definite decision about it.
6. Write and sign a "living together agreement" to help clarify your expectations and define how you'll handle finances and property. The conversations you'll need to have in order to do this will strengthen your relationship -- and protect you later if you decide it's best to go your separate ways. The book *Living Together: A Legal Guide for Unmarried Couples*, by Attorneys Toni Ihara, Ralph Warner, and Frederick Hertz, has great samples agreements you can modify (it's available from AtMP).
7. Take a couples' education class. Research suggests that all couples have the same number of conflicts, but some handle conflicts well while others break up as a result of them. Couples' classes, which teach how to make sure your relationship can survive conflict, are often targeted for married or engaged couples. Before you sign up, make sure they believe in strengthening cohabitators' relationships, too.
8. If you're considering or planning to get married, talk about what will change and what will stay the same. Will your household chores change? The way your bank accounts are set up? Do you think people will treat you differently, and how do you feel about that? What does it mean to you to be a husband or a wife? There are no right or wrong answers -- what's important is that you stay conscious about your choices instead of having them dictated by a soap opera script.

9. Use birth control. It's a lot more fun and romantic to get married because you want to, not because you accidentally got pregnant. The unplanned pregnancy rate is high among cohabitators, but kids do best when they're wanted and planned. Whether you're married or not when you become a parent, your family will be strongest if it's fully intentional.

10. Talk about marriage with people you respect who have been married a long time. Ask them about the hardest times, how and why they stayed together, what it was like when the relationship felt rocky, how they feel about it now. The insights from long marriages can be inspiring -- and a good reality check.

For further information on this topic, check out [Unmarried To Each Other: The Essential Guide To Living Together as an Unmarried Couple](#).

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