

## What You Need to Know About Living Together

Before making the important decision about whether to live together or not, consider these common myths.

### **Myth #1 Living together is an easy way to “try out” the relationship before committing to marriage.**

**Fact:** While the idea of “test driving” a car before you buy it is a good idea, it doesn’t apply to marriage. Living together is basically a “pretend marriage” and nothing like the real thing. Couples who live together typically have attitudes like “I can leave anytime” and “my money vs. your money,” which are attitudes married couples usually don’t have. Married couples have a stronger bond to each other because of their vow of permanence. Married couples also tend to have less volatile relationships.

### **Myth #2 Living together will give us a stronger marriage.**

**Fact:** Although many couples think that moving in together can give them a great head start in their marriage, living together can actually harm your marriage. Couples who live together have a divorce rate that is 50 percent higher than those who don’t.

### **Myth #3 Sharing finances and expenses will make things easier on our relationship.**

**Fact:** While sharing finances and expenses seems like the easy thing to do in the beginning, problems do arise. Just like any couple, disputes often center around money. Couples who live together have more financial issues to resolve. Conflicts arise over who is responsible for which bill and the rights one partner has to tell the other how to spend “their money.”

### **Myth #4 Marriage is just a piece of paper.**

**Fact:** Legally, marriage is paperwork. Emotionally, physically, and spiritually, marriage is a contract of commitment. Viewing marriage as a legal arrangement strips it of its meaning and sets the relationship up for failure. If couples do not view marriage as a loving, committed relationship, divorce is almost inevitable.

### **Myth #5 Your sex life ends when you get married.**

**Fact:** The level of sexual satisfaction is lower among couples who live together than for married couples. Couples who live together tend to be less faithful to their partners than married couples.

### **Myth #6 It’s only temporary.**

**Fact:** Many people enter a cohabiting relationship hoping that they will be married soon, however, living together isn’t always a stepping-stone to marriage. Research tracking cohabiting couples over five to seven years report that 21 percent still lived together without marrying, 40 percent had married and 39 percent had split up. In other words, 60 percent of couples living together did not go on to marry each other.

### **Myth #7 Living together is best if there are children involved.**

**Fact:** The effect of cohabitation on children is significant. Children in these situations are at risk of emotional and social difficulties, performing poorly in school, having early premarital sex and having difficulty forming permanent emotional attachments in adulthood. If the man in the household is not the biological father, children are at greater risk of experiencing physical and sexual abuse.

## **How to Have a Healthy, Long-Lasting Relationship**

No one wants to suffer the heartache of a broken relationship, whether it is a divorce or the dissolution of a cohabiting situation. While living together has many short-term advantages, it comes at a high long-term cost. If your goal is to have a stable, healthy and fulfilling relationship, here are some tips.

**1. Time** Time is the only surefire way to find out if a couple is compatible. Time gives you the opportunity to see how your partner handles different situations that life throws at you: the hard stressful times, the joyous and rewarding times, and the humdrum of everyday. If you can survive these life events with someone and still love them, then there is an excellent chance your relationship will last.

**2. Learn to communicate.** Relationships aren’t always wine and roses. Your partner will disappoint and frustrate you at times. Knowing how to communicate increases your chances of being able to resolve and even prevent conflict.

**3. Consider marriage.** What makes marriage unique from simply living together is a “vow of

permanence.” Partners publicly promise that they will no longer be alone and no matter what happens down the road someone will be there to take care of you and support you. Commitment is the heart of marriage.

### **Statistics**

In a 2003 study, married couples who lived together before marriage had a 65 percent “greater risk of dissolution” than did couples who did not live together before marriage. (Journal of Marriage and Family, May 2003)

A 1995 study based on national data found that cohabiting couples reported less commitment and happiness and poorer relationships with their parents than did married couples. (Journal of Family Issues, January 1995)

A 2003 study of 3,732 adults found that, compared to married couples, cohabitants are less happy with their relationships and report more instability. Long-term cohabiting couples report particularly high levels of instability and low levels of happiness. (Journal of Family Issues, July 2003)

A 2003 study of over 4,000 couples found that, compared to married women, cohabiting women are at much higher risk for experiencing “intense male violence.” (Journal of Marriage and Family, August 2003)

Cohabitants are twice as likely to be unfaithful as are married people. Even when researchers controlled for their more permissive attitudes about extramarital sex, cohabitants showed greater infidelity, leading researchers to conclude that their “lower investments” in cohabiting unions – rather than their values – accounted for increased

infidelity. (Journal of Marriage and Family, February 2000)

A 2002 study determined that married couples who cohabit before marriage have poorer communication skills than do non-cohabiting couples. The authors of the study suggested that poor communication may contribute to the high marital breakup rate among couples who live together before marriage. (Journal of Marriage and Family, February 2002)

A 1997 study found that young adults who cohabited between age 18 and 23 developed negative attitudes toward marriage, found divorce more acceptable and desired fewer children than non-cohabiting couples. (Journal of Marriage and Family, August 1997)

Before reaching age 16, three quarters of children born to cohabiting couples will experience the breakup of their parent’s relationship; only one-third of children born to married parents will experience parental divorce or separation. (National Marriage Project 2002)

In a 2002 study conducted by The Urban Institute found that, compared to children raised by their married biological parents, children living in cohabiting households are more than twice as likely to be poor and have emotional and behavioral problems. (The Urban Institute, July 2002)

*From First Things First’s Internet site:  
[www.firstthings.org](http://www.firstthings.org). First Things First is the  
Community Marriage Policy encourager in  
Chattanooga, TN.*