

What Is Premarital Counseling?

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What Is Premarital Counseling?

Premarital counseling is a form of [couples therapy](#) that can help you and your partner prepare for [marriage](#).

It is intended to help you and your partner discuss several important issues, ranging from finances to children so that you are both on the same page. It can also help identify potential conflict areas and equip you and your partner with tools to navigate them successfully. Premarital counseling aims to help you build a strong foundation for [marriage](#).

“Premarital counseling helps couples create a blueprint for their lives together,” says [Sabrina Romanoff](#), PsyD, a licensed psychologist who specializes in relationships.

Types of Premarital Counseling

According to Romanoff, there are different types of couples therapy, and many of them can be universally applied to couples at any stage of their relationship, including premarital counseling.

“Many clinicians will be integrative in their approach to couples therapy and will draw from several therapies, depending on the unique needs of their patients,” says Romanoff.

These are some of the [types of therapy](#) a premarital counselor may use.

Gottman Method

The Gottman Method, developed by Drs. John and Julie Gottman, involves conducting a detailed assessment of you and your partner and then using a therapeutic framework to address areas of conflict.

This form of therapy aims to improve the quality of friendship between you and your partner, [increase intimacy](#), and equip you with [problem-solving skills](#) that can help you build a stronger relationship.¹

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

[Emotionally focused therapy](#), developed by Drs. Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg, is a form of short-term therapy. It aims to improve the [attachment](#) and bond between you and your partner, leading to better communication and a stronger relationship.

Psychodynamic Couples Therapy

[Psychodynamic](#) couples therapy examines the underlying issues that motivate interaction cycles. Identifying and addressing factors like your hopes for closeness, love, and appreciation and fears of abandonment and disapproval can help you and your partner better understand and accept each other.

Techniques

In the initial stages of premarital counseling, you and your partner may be [assessed](#), both individually and together. During the course of the counseling, both of you will be encouraged to share life experiences and events, which can help shed light on your expectations and motivations in a relationship.

Premarital counseling also involves discussing important aspects of a marriage, including “financial planning, roles in the marriage, decision-

making processes, family relationships, if children will be in your future, and how you wish to raise them,” says Romanoff.

Assessing You and Your Partner

Premarital counseling often requires you and your partner to fill out a questionnaire separately to determine how you feel about one another and what you [expect](#) from your relationship. These questionnaires can help your counselor identify your strengths, weaknesses, areas of compatibility, and potential [problem areas](#).

Your counselor will also assess the dynamic between you and your partner during counseling sessions and use those insights to guide the course of the therapy.

Sharing Life Events and Experiences

Premarital counseling can also involve “identifying and exploring significant life events and early childhood experiences, which impact the relationship and how each partner relates to the other,” says Romanoff.

For instance, Romanoff explains that partners often choose each other for reasons that are not fully conscious; it is only with further processing that they may understand how familiar aspects of their partner relate to unresolved conflicts in the past.

Discussing Important Issues

Premarital counseling offers an opportunity to discuss several important aspects of a marriage, including:

- **Finances:** Money can be a stressful and [contentious issue](#) for married couples, so deciding how to manage your finances in advance can help prevent problems down the road.
- **Beliefs, values, and religion:** Sharing your beliefs, values, and [religious sentiments](#) with your partner can help foster better understanding and respect. You can also discuss the implications of these aspects on your daily life.
- **Roles in the marriage:** It’s important to discuss the [roles](#) you expect yourself and your partner to play in your marriage to prevent conflicts later on.

- **Activities and time spent together:** You and your partner can discuss how you plan to spend time together and what [activities](#) you enjoy doing together.
- **Children:** Couples sometimes realize after getting married that they are not on the same page about whether or not they want to have children. Deciding in advance whether or not you want to have kids and how you want to [raise them](#) is important.
- **Family relationships:** Premarital counseling can offer you a chance to be honest about your relationships with your own [family](#) as well as any concerns you have about your partner's family.

[When Your Parents Disapprove of Your Marriage](#)

What Premarital Counseling Can Help With

Premarital counseling can help you and your partner prepare for [married life](#) together. Below are some aspects premarital counseling can help with.

Premarital counseling helps identify core beliefs, set realistic expectations for marriage, plan for the future, and decide the ways in which your lives will be merged.

— SABRINA ROMANOFF, PSYD

- **Understanding your partner:** Premarital counseling can help you develop a better understanding of your partner. In particular, it can help you understand your partner's beliefs, values, expectations, motivations, priorities, and routine.
- **Setting realistic expectations:** This form of counseling allows you to discuss all the important aspects of married life with your partner so that you both know what to expect. It also helps identify your strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as a [couple](#).
- **Planning for the future:** Much like you and your partner would meet with a wedding planner to plan your big day, seeing a premarital counselor can help you plan your marriage and your life together.

[Important Advice for Newlywed Couples](#)

Benefits of Premarital Counseling

Premarital counseling is designed to equip you and your partner with tools to navigate married life together. These are some of the benefits this therapy can offer:

- **Learn constructive communication:** A core aspect of premarital counseling is [communication](#), as “partners learn to convey their positions clearly without attacking or arming the other,” says Romanoff.
- **Develop conflict resolution skills:** Premarital counseling also teaches you and your partner problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. “Initially, communication often leads to conflict, but with time, couples can have more constructive discussions,” says Romanoff.
- **Focus on the positive aspects:** Premarital counseling can help you and your partner focus on the positive aspects of your relationship rather than the [negative](#).
- **Eliminate dysfunctional behavior:** Premarital counseling can identify [unhealthy behaviors](#) and patterns in a relationship and help you correct them.
- **Build decision-making processes:** Premarital counseling can help you and your partner develop healthy and equitable decision-making processes.
- **Alleviate fears related to marriage:** If you or your partner are anxious about what married life will entail, premarital counseling can help you discuss important issues and give you some clarity.

[Why Expressing Feelings With Your Partner Is Worth the Emotional Risk](#)

Effectiveness

The aim of premarital counseling is to improve your relationship with your partner and help you build a strong foundation for marriage.

A 2012 study found that couples who engaged in premarital counseling reported higher levels of satisfaction in their relationship.²

Premarital counseling also allows you and your partner to decide important aspects of the relationship before they become an issue.

“Couples tend to seek therapy when they are in crisis and the relationship is constrained. This means that the couple is already polarized, and each partner is defensively posturing, which makes it more difficult to communicate and make progress effectively,” says Romanoff.

While couples therapy can also be helpful if you're having [marriage problems](#) down the road, premarital counseling can help you discuss important topics for the relationship without being under the immediacy of the problem, according to Romanoff. This can make it easier for you and your partner to work together to solve your issues.

Things to Consider

If you take part in premarital counseling, you may find that you also want to see a counselor or therapist separately to deal with the issues you encounter in your joint sessions.

"Couples therapy will often uncover unexpected personal reactions and experiences that have been well buried. Frequently, couples decide to initiate individual therapy to have their own space to process all that it brings up for them," says Romanoff.

It's also worth noting that while premarital counseling aims to help strengthen the bond between you and your partner, it could also expose [irreconcilable differences](#) in your personalities or expectations. For instance, not wanting to have children could be a dealbreaker for one of you.

In that case, you and your partner are probably better off discovering and discussing these issues before you get married.

How to Get Started

Premarital counseling requires participation from you and your partner, so both of you should be willing to give it a try. If your partner is reluctant, explain why it's important to you and what you hope to gain from it.

You can find a premarital counselor through your friends, family, workplace, [insurance provider](#), or religious institution. If you're seeing a mental health practitioner for other reasons, they may be able to provide a recommendation as well. Local and state mental health agencies also often have resources you can turn to.

You will have to schedule your counseling sessions at a time and place that both you and your partner can attend.

A Word From Verywell

Premarital counseling offers a neutral space for you and your partner to discuss and plan important aspects of your marriage. A counselor can help guide you through these discussions so that they are productive.

Moreover, premarital counseling equips you with tools that can help you and your partner communicate better with each other and [resolve conflicts](#) constructively.

“One of the most effective aspects of premarital counseling is the opportunity to improve communication skills by instilling strategies, teaching tools, and unpacking repetitious conflicts in the relationship,” says Romanoff.

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Expertise

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Education

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Highlights

- Health writer and editor since 2014
- Featured in Insider, Livestrong.com, and Times Internet
- Passionate about health and wellness

Researching and writing about health has taught me a lot about myself, my body, and the world around me. I hope my work is helpful to you on your journey of health and wellness.

— SANJANA GUPTA

Experience

Sanjana has been a health writer and editor since 2014. She has written extensively for platforms like Insider, Livestrong.com, and Times Internet. Her work spans various health-related topics, including mental health, fitness, nutrition, and wellness.

Education

Sanjana has a master's degree in digital journalism from New York University. She also holds a master's degree in management from the University of Mumbai

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