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Just Married ... and Divorced

Monday, December 08, 2008

FOX NEWS



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No one wants to go into a marriage thinking it's destined to fail. But these days, it's hard not to be scared by the statistics. So, we're offering you some couples therapy ... free of charge. Check out these tips for making marriage work from Dr. Reef Karim.

Young love ... there's no better feeling. It's exciting, intoxicating, euphoric. When in love, we feel "chemistry" literally—our brain's reward and pleasure circuitry lights up like a Christmas tree. And what's the ultimate prize for being in love? Getting married. So with all that build up, why are so many young couples getting divorced? As a relationship therapist, I get asked this question all the time.

Are people taking marriage seriously? Are people preparing for marriage? Is marriage a dying concept? Let's look at the numbers. 50-60% of marriages end in divorce. There are too many divorces. And there are too many marriages. It's so important to get married for the right reasons, because couples have a higher probability of staying together if they do the "emotional preparation" before tying the knot. When I'm doing couples and relationship therapy, I ask people, "Why did you get married?" And I'm always amazed at the responses I get. "I was bored." "I was lonely." "The sex was good." These are typical answers to my question.

And my responses? "If you're bored, get a hobby." "If you're lonely, get a puppy." "If the sex is good, keep having sex." You see, boredom, loneliness, sex ... none of those are good reasons to get married. Marriage will not "cure" your individual difficulties. Love—alone—will not sustain a healthy, happy marriage. We all need to do the work—to understand ourselves as individuals—before getting married.

In a fast paced, high tech, instant gratification society, many of us just react to our environment and don't take the time to figure ourselves out—to understand why we do the things we do, why we react the way we react, why we get anxious or bored or angry in certain situations. We may get by on our own, but once we

make decisions as a team, the rules of the game ... change. Our ability to "give in" is tested. We have to choose our battles. We have to deal with extra stress. All because we care deeply about another person.

So what should we do? I highly recommend marriage counseling (before getting married) to all couples thinking about tying the knot. If we can understand how we can work as a team and bring in our individual strengths and understand our individual weaknesses, we can develop a higher functioning partnership. Whether you are in couples therapy or just talking to your future bride/groom, I suggest discussing the following topics before getting married:

- **Finances**
- **Religion**
- **Kids**
- **In-Laws**
- **Living Situation**
- **Drugs/Alcohol**
- **Time Management:** how each person manages their time
- **Stress:** how each person deals with stress (coping skills)
- **Conflict:** how each person deals with anger and conflict
- **Sex:** what each person likes and is it working

These 10 categories are the primary reasons why I see couples break up. The conversations can be stressful but they are well worth it. For example, financial discussions include discussing each person's debt, numbers of credit cards, financial worth and whether to have separate bank accounts, a joint account or both. Discussing religion includes each person's religious views, sense of spirituality, and future plans on what religion to teach the children.

If you can talk about these subjects in an honest and insightful way and learn to work together, you should be able to navigate through the rough but wonderful waters of a healthy relationship. Remember, love does not conquer all, but it's a pretty good place to start. Now, instead of basking in the love 24-7, do some "emotional work" and your marriage will have a much better chance of working out.

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