

Ideas about marriage have changed in the last several decades. Many couples have decided to live together (co-habitate) rather than marry. Living together was once rare but is now very popular. Couples who decide to live together do so for different reasons. Some of these reasons may include:

- Believing that marriage “is just a piece of paper”
- Compromising with a partner who doesn’t want to be married
- Giving the relationship a “trial run”
- Economic or practical reasons
- Fear of a long-term commitment
- Fear of divorce
- Needing a father figure for children

While cohabiting may seem like the good way to go, it has many negative side effects and problems that will show up over time.

“It’s Just ‘a Piece of Paper’ We Don’t Need It To Prove Our Commitment”

If it is just “a piece of paper,” what exactly are you afraid of? Most people know deep down that marriage is far more than just “a piece of paper.” Getting married means that you are now more than a live-in significant other. It means you are now a wife or husband. You have made vows to each other in front of witnesses, the people in your lives who mean the most to you, that you will be committed to one another for life. This piece of paper means you have legal obligations to one another. It means that your possessions belong to each other. It also means your families become each other’s.

Compromising With a Partner Who Doesn’t Want to Be Married

With some couples there may be a partner who just does not want to marry. Instead of ending the relationship, many couples compromise and move in with each other. If it is your partner who doesn’t want to marry, consider this: most people probably do want to marry someday. The harsh reality may be that your partner just doesn’t want to marry you! There is a distinct possibility that your partner may change his or her mind about living together with you when someone else comes along. Consider that one of you really isn’t planning on a forever relationship.

Giving the Relationship a “Trial Run” Before Marriage

When a relationship is a “trial run,” it has failed before it has even started. A relationship has to last in good times and bad. Every relationship has problems, and if it is a “trial” relationship then the easiest way out of problems is to leave. If the relationship does make it to a wedding, research indicates that those who live together first have significantly lower marital satisfaction than those who do not.¹ Conventional wisdom tells us that it is best to try something before you buy it; however, for marriage the opposite is true. With marriage, only true commitment will get you through the tough times.

Economic or Practical Reasons

Some people find it more practical to live together. It is often convenient to have a second person working and the built-in support of having a second person at home. The statistics show something else. Poverty rates are much higher among couples who live together than among married couples. Unmarried couples have 68 percent

less wealth on average than married couples.

If you are the woman in the relationship, the statistics show something even worse. Women who live with their partners often end up with the majority of the responsibilities of marriage without any of the legal protection. In unmarried households, women do the majority of the child care and often contribute more than 70 percent of the couple's income.² If the man chooses to leave the unmarried relationship, there is no requirement for him to help the woman in any way.

Fear of Long-Term Commitment

Many couples may find that one of the partners is frightened about making a long-term commitment. They are afraid about making a choice that could affect the rest of their lives. If you are the one with the fear, you need to make the decision – is my partner the one for life? If not, get out of the relationship. If so, get married.

If your partner is the one who is afraid, remember that they are keeping their options open. They are afraid something better will come along and they will be tied down. Don't be someone's "fall-back" plan. If your partner is unwilling to commit, then it is time to move on.

Fear of Divorce

Some people are concerned that getting married will lead to divorce. Statistics show that the opposite is true. Relationships are VERY unstable when couples live together. Only one-sixth of couples who live together stay together for three years or more; only one in ten survives five or more years.³ Sixty-seven percent of people who have cohabitated never get married at all.⁴ Couples that do end up getting married have almost a 50 percent higher rate of divorce than married couples that do not live together first.⁵

Needing a Father Figure For Children

Some people assume that if a couple has children and live together they will be committed and stable. However, couples who live together with children are even more likely to break up than childless couples.⁶ The poverty rate among children of couples who live together is five times greater than the rate among children in married households.² Children living with unmarried parents are the most unsafe. They are at significantly higher risk of child abuse. Live-in and visiting boyfriends are a great deal more likely than are fathers or married stepfathers to inflict serious physical and sexual abuse.⁹

The Conclusion

Nearly every study done on cohabitation indicates that living together does not produce healthier, happier marriages. It is not possible to be deeply intimate and connected with someone when you fear the loss of the relationship. Living together gives no security to either partner or to the children. Mature love is built on the security of knowing that your love is exclusive and permanent. Making the painful decision to live alone until marriage will benefit you, your future spouse, and your children.

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