**The Couples Handbook**

Although I make no claim to be an expert in the field of couples and marriage therapy, my personal experience combined with professional training and spiritual foundation, do assist me in helping others through difficult times that often presents itself when two individuals make the decision to unite as one. This couple’s handbook is composed of materials presented by respected professionals in the field of couples and family therapy. Every healthy relationship deserves a fighting chance!

Christina Marie Daniels, HHP,SC

# Relationship Advice for Couples Counselling Session…****Want to Discover the SECRET to making the most of your relationship counselling? Please read on…****

**This valuable relationship therapy advice is adapted from an article written by renowned relationship experts, Dr. Ellyn Bader and Dr. Peter Pearson of The Couples Institute, USA.**

The circle of life

Most of the people who come to Marriage Works have very little, if any, knowledge of the couple therapy process, as they have never sought assistance for their relationship problems.

**You are not alone!**

Let us guide you with some insights and a few important tips on how you can get the most from our work together and how you can prepare for and maximise the value and benefits that you will get from our counselling sessions.

## ****Goals and Objectives of Couples Therapy****

The primary aim of Couples Therapy is to increase your knowledge about yourself, your partner, and the patterns of interaction between the two of you. Therapy becomes effective when you apply this new knowledge to break ineffective patterns and develop better ones.

### key tasks of Couples Therapy are to increase your clarity about:

* The **kind of life you want**to build together
* The **kind of partner you aspire to be**in order to build the kind of life and relationship you want to create
* Your **individual blocks** to becoming the kind of partner you aspire to be
* The **skills and knowledge**necessary to do the above tasks.

## ****Tips on How You Can Make the Most of Your Couples Therapy****

### **Tip # 1: Determine Your Goals and Objectives**

Take some time to think about your goals and what you want to achieve in coming to counselling.

Don’t give up on your relationship!

#### Here are a few questions you need to ask yourself to develop clarity about your relationship goals:

1. What kind of life do you want to build together and individually?
2. What kind of partner do you want to become so you can build the kind of life and relationship that is meaningful to you?
3. What are your individual blocks to becoming the kind of partner you aspire to be?
4. What skills and knowledge do you need to be able to do the above tasks?

You will notice that these questions are about zeroing in on what you need and value.

### **Tip #2: Focus on YOU**

Interestingly, relationship counselling works best if you have more goals for yourself than your partner, so:

1. Focus on **changing yourself** rather than changing your partner.
2. Focus on **learning something new** and **letting go of assumptions** for your partner’s motives.
3. Focus on **improving your response**to a problem

**How to Maximize the Value from Your Couples Therapy Sessions**

In order to get the most from your Couples Therapy sessions, it is helpful to be aware of unproductive patterns so you know what to avoid when you go to your therapy sessions. A common yet unproductive pattern in Couples Therapy is **focusing on the problem** that you have at the moment. This is a reactive (and mostly ineffective) approach to resolving issues.

The second unproductive pattern is when both of you come to the session saying, **“I don’t know what to talk about, do you?”** Although this blank slate approach may open some interesting doors, it is a hit or miss process.

The third common unproductive pattern is **discussing your fights** – whether it be the fight that you are in at the moment or the one that you had since your last session. Talking about these fights or arguments without considering a broader context of what you would like to learn from the experience is often an exercise in spinning your wheels.

Over time, repeating these unproductive patterns will only lead to the plaintive question, **“Are we getting anywhere?”**

#### A more powerful approach **to Couples Therapy** is for each person to do the following before each session:

1. **Reflect**on your objectives for being in therapy.
2. **Think about your next step** that supports or relates to your larger objectives for attaining the kind of relationship that you wish to create, or the partner that you aspire to become.

These reflections will require some effort, but keep in mind that your preparation will eventually pay high dividends.

## ****Important Concepts for Couples Therapy and Relationships****

The following concepts will help you identify areas of focus in our work and/or stimulate discussion between you and your partner between meetings. As you review these regularly, you will discover that your reflections and associations will begin to change. We recommend that you revisit these concepts often, as these will help keep you focused during our work.

### **Attitude is Key**

When working towards improving your relationship, your attitude towards change is more important than the action you need to take. It is relatively easy to determine what to do and how to do it. The real challenge is getting yourself to actually do it.

Learning how to**think differently about a problem**is often more effective than thinking about what action you need to take.

The fact is, your partner is limited in his or her ability to respond to you and vice versa. Accepting this fact is a huge step towards maturity.

There is a definite possibility that you have flawed assumptions about your partner’s motives and that he or she also has flawed assumptions about yours. The problem is, most of the time, we refuse to believe that those assumptions are flawed.

### **Focus on Changing Yourself Rather Than Changing Your Partner**

Couples Therapy works best if you **set** **more goals for yourself**than for your partner. While it is human nature to want to change one’s partner instead of adjusting our expectations, having this mindset often leads to problems among couples, especially when things do not turn out as they expected or hoped.

The most difficult challenge in Couples Therapy is learning to accept that **you need to improve how you respond to a problem**(how you think or feel and what you do about it). Very few people want to focus on improving their response. It’s more common to build a strong case for why the other should do the improving. However, keep in mind that **you can’t change your partner and your partner can’t change you.** **But YOU can change you.**

### **Focus on Learning About Yourself and Your Reactions**

Try to learn more about yourself by understanding what annoys you or pushes your buttons and how you handle it.

**Notes on how to make the most of your couple therapy by Dr. Ellyn Bader:**

This article is designed to help you get the most benefit from our work together. The first three sections discuss how you can prepare for and maximise the value of our sessions. The fourth section summarises some brief concepts about relationships and productive couples therapy.

Your job is to **create your own individual objectives**for being in therapy, and **our job is to help you reach them**. At Marriage Works, we have many tools to help you become a **more effective partner**, and these tools work best when you are clear about who you aspire to be. Our goal is to help both of you make better adjustments and responses to each other without violating your core values or deeply held principles.

## ****Trade-offs and Tough Choices****

If you want to create sustained improvement in your relationship, you need:

* **A vision**of the life you want to build together and individually
* The **appropriate attitudes**and skills to work as a team
* The **motivation**to persist
* Time to review **progress**

To create the relationship you really desire, there will be some difficult trade-offs and tough choices for each of you.

The first trade-off will be **time**.

Bring your family back to love.

It simply takes time to create a relationship that flourishes: time to be together, time to be with family, time to play, coordinate, nurture, relax, hang out, and plan. This time will encroach on some other valuable areas – your personal or professional time.

The second compromise is **comfort**. That means **emotional comfort**, like going out on a limb to try novel ways of things, listening and being curious instead of  butting in, speaking up instead of becoming resentfully compliant or withdrawing. At the beginning, there will be emotional risks in taking action, but you will never explore different worlds if you always keep sight of the shoreline. In addition, few people are emotionally comfortable being confronted with how they don’t live their values or being confronted with the consequences of their actions.

The other comfort that will be challenged is **energy comfort**. It simply takes effort to sustain improvement over time – staying conscious of making a difference over time – remembering to be more respectful, more giving, more appreciative, etc. It takes effort to remember and act.

The other effort is can be more difficult for some people –

Don’t pull the pin on your relationship!

that is **improving reaction to problems**. For example, if one person is hypersensitive to criticism, and his or her partner is hypersensitive to feeling ignored, it will take a lot of effort to improve their sensitivity instead of hoping the partner will stop ignoring or criticizing.

In all these areas, there is generally a conflict between short-term gratification and the long-term goal of creating a satisfying relationship. The blunt reality is that, in an interdependent relationship, **effort is required on the part of each person**to make a sustained improvement. It is like pairs figure skating – one person cannot do most of the work and still create an exceptional team. True intimacy heals.

# 9 things a couples therapist wants you to know before getting married

You're in love and you're engaged, but are you really ready for married life?

by A. Pawlowski

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But if it’s a good match to start with, don’t couples just instinctively know how to have good relationship? Not necessarily, said [Liz Higgins](http://www.lizhigginsmft.com/), a licensed marriage and family therapist in Dallas, Texas, who offers premarital counseling and specializes in millennial couples.

“There are definitely elements of many healthy couples that can make them have a strong solid foundation,” Higgins told TODAY. “But every single couple — no matter how healthy, happy and into each other they are — are going to experience conflict at one point or another.”

Here are nine things she wants couples to know before getting married:

## 1. YOUR SPOUSE IS NOT GOING TO COMPLETE YOU.

That famous line from “Jerry Maguire” sounds romantic, but don’t expect your partner to complete your life, Higgins said.

“It’s really important for you to focus on you — not in a selfish way, not in a way that disregards your partner, but in a way where you understand taking care of yourself is going to help you bring your best self to your relationship,” Higgins said.

Couples need to be able to have a balance of separateness and togetherness, she added.

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## 2. BE AWARE OF THE EXPECTATIONS YOU’RE BRINGING INTO THE MARRIAGE.

You probably want [a lot from just one person](https://www.today.com/health/love-hacks-happier-marriage-t117078): A companion, a passionate lover, good parent and more, so issues can come up after Higgins presents couples with “an expectation inventory.” Here are some sample statements — would you and your future spouse agree?

* My partner will meet all of my needs for companionship.
* I don’t believe romance should fade over time.
* I don’t believe that my partner’s [interest in sex](https://www.today.com/health/be-happy-together-how-often-does-couple-need-sex-t56561) should be different than mine.

## 3. YOU WON’T ALWAYS FEEL “IN LOVE.”

“You could be with the most perfect partner in the world for you and you’re going to go through seasons where you feel like you’re not aligned and you’re not in love,” Higgins said. “That’s where it’s really important to be grounded in the values that you identify as a couple, versus trying to follow the feelings that you think you’re supposed to be having.”

## 4. YOUR PARTNER’S FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY.

How did you partner get along with his family? Were they close or distant? Was there conflict? That information is very significant, Higgins noted.

“Many of the themes in our family of origin repeat or resurface in marriage,” she said. “When couples are able to talk about that stuff without judgment, are able to listen and tune into their partner’s experience, it’s so huge. It creates a deep level of trust.”

# [Couples say faith and love help marriages last](https://www.today.com/video/today/54709219)

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## 5. KNOW YOUR PARTNER’S FINANCES.

Higgins believes you should both disclose your entire financial situations. From there, start to decide: What’s the best way to [manage the finances](https://www.today.com/popculture/love-money-how-handle-both-your-relationship-1D79964488)? Many young couples today have one joint account, plus their own separate accounts.

“That’s fine, if that’s what works. But you want to talk about it to make sure that’s not because you are feeling controlled or you’re bringing in insecurities,” Higgins said. “Finances are where the mistrust and issues can surface. It’s one of the top reasons people divorce.”

Money can be such a touchy topic that for some couples, talking about it can be more uncomfortable than discussing sex, she noted.

## 6. CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE — RECOGNIZE YOUR ROLE IN RESOLVING IT.

When you’re in the honeymoon phase, it’s hard to imagine there will be arguments or that your spouse has annoying traits and habits, but all of that awaits. How will you deal?

Often, the things you dislike or despise later in your relationship [have more to do with you](https://www.today.com/health/8-signs-you-re-problem-relationship-t116533) than your partner, Higgins said. It’s all about the vulnerabilities, insecurities and discomfort you bring in.

“A big piece about how to handle conflict and anger is knowing that it starts with yourself... how you can manage your own anxiety, practice healthy ways of taking care of you, and just making sure you’re in a good place to address whatever stressors are happening,” she noted.

From there, it’s about knowing how to come together and communicate as a couple. People are very quick to respond and react, but what you need to do is stop, be present and listen, Higgins advised.

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## 7. DISCUSS WHAT A BREACH OF TRUST WOULD MEAN TO YOU.

Will you be monogamous and committed only to each other, or are you OK with a more open marriage? It depends on the couple and what their personal boundaries and values are, Higgins noted.

What would a[betrayal](https://www.today.com/health/surviving-betrayal-11-ways-get-over-affair-t78146) mean to you? For some people, unacceptable behavior can mean flirting, sending texts or having an emotional affair. For others, the only deal-breaker may be sleeping with someone else. Talk about it before you get married.

## 8. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, DON’T CALL IT QUITS RIGHT AWAY.

Many young married couples [get divorced](https://www.today.com/health/why-couples-get-divorced-t117476) very soon — less than five years into their marriages, Higgins has observed.

“There’s a mentality in our world today that if something’s not working for you, get rid of it,” she noted. “But conflicts in marriages and relationships are opportunities to grow.”

Unless you’re experiencing abuse or other intolerable behavior, give yourself the chance to try to work things out, she advised.

## 9. EXPRESS LOVE

Research by psychologist John Gottman found a [“magic” 5-to-1 ratio](https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-magic-relationship-ratio-according-science/)among healthy couples: For every one negative interaction during a conflict, people in a stable and happy marriage had five or more positive interactions.

“The positivity is crucial. It’s really important to feel like you’re in a good place, and that is definitely shown through the little acts of love,” Higgins said. “Not the big things, like planning lavish trips or spending a million bucks on your partner, but just waking up in the morning and giving them a kiss.”

**7 Ways To Save Your Marriage**

**(When You Feel Hopeless)**

If you think your marriage is unsalvageable, think again.

[Merethe Najjar](https://www.yourtango.com/users/merethe-najjar)

Editor

I'm a specialist in marriage rescue and I'm here to help you learn how to save your marriage. You can tell that your marriage probably needs rescuing if you've been feeling angry about what’s been happening and/or hopeless about changing the situation for the better.

The good news is that anger and hopelessness can offer you clues about how to save your marriage. These bad feelings can help you to clarify what you want.

Let’s focus on how to use these negative emotions to guide you to a better marriage. Most of my clients are couples who come to treatment feeling chronically angry at their spouse and hopeless about their relationship’s challenges. Many are contemplating divorce.

**RELATED:**[**3 Steps To Save Your Relationship When You've Drifted Too Far Apart**](https://www.yourtango.com/experts/drdavidmcfadden/how-to-save-marriage-when-drifted-apart)

By the end of treatment, they have created great marriages. How? Here's the seven-step pathway I recommend:

**1. Make a list of all the issues you argue or feel hopeless about.**

Anger does not mean it’s time to fight. Hopelessness does not mean you should just give up on saving your marriage and get divorced. Anger *and*hopelessness do indicate that there’s a problem, a bump on your marriage path. So begin by asking yourself, “[What do I feel angry or hopeless about](https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-7-best-tips-for-handling-anger-and-resentment-in-relationships/)?”

Write out a list of all the issues that you have been arguing about or giving up on. Include on your list the issues that concern your spouse as well as the ones that irritate and frustrate you

**2. Refocus onto yourself.**

Notice that when you feel angry, your focus will tend to be on your spouse, on what she or he does or doesn’t do that frustrates you. This second step requires a shift a focus, from focusing outward on him or her to focusing inward on your own concerns and desires.

Circle back to your list, asking yourself, “With regard to this issue, what do I want?” or “What is my concern?” Double check. Are you writing what you want *your spouse* to do differently? If you have been writing “I want *him/her* to...” you have yet to shift your focus. List only, “I want to...” (e.g, “I want *her*to stop being so messy and to clean up after herself” focuses on the spouse. “I want tofind a way to make the spaces I spend time in, like the kitchen and our living room, to be more neat and orderly.”)

Attempts to make your partner change invite defensiveness. That strategy will get you nowhere. Instead, use your energy to figure out what you want and then what you yourself might do differently to get it, becoming "self-centered" in the best possible sense. When spouses look at what they themselves might do differently to get what they want, there’s progress.

In the following TEDx talk, starting at 4:00 minutes, I explain visualizing techniques you can use to help you with implementing these first two steps for saving your marriage. Visualizing enables you, by closing your eyes, to see more deeply into your subconscious thoughts and understandings.

The video illustrates first how to use visualizing to identify the situations that have been creating your feelings of anger and/or or hopelessness (i.e., depression).  Visualizing then can help you to clarify how, [without changing the other person](https://goodmenproject.com/sex-relationships/10-reasons-why-you-have-to-stop-trying-to-change-someone-babb/), you might find better ways of getting what you want.

**3. Stop The Negativity.**

The negative muck you give each other is totally unhelpful. Negative comments to each other only taint a positive relationship. So, no more criticism, complaints, blame, accusations, anger, sarcasm, digs or snide remarks. No more raised voices or anger escalations either. Stay in the calm zone.

[Exit an argument early and often](https://www.yourtango.com/experts/linda-salazar/8-ways-fight-your-husband-real-adult) if either of you start to get heated. Calm down so that when you re-engage, you only talk calmly and cooperatively.

Marriage researcher John Gottman has found that marriages generally survive if the ratio of good to bad interactions is five to one. But do you want to survive, or do you want to thrive? If thriving is your goal, aim for a ratio of a million to one. That means, do NOT sling mud.

**4. Express concerns constructively and make decisions cooperatively.**

A simple way to stay constructive in sensitive conversations is to pick from the following trio of potential sentence starters

* *"I feel..."*
* *"My concern is..."*
* *"I would like to..."*

Understanding each other’s concerns is essential for the two of you to begin doing what I call that the win-win waltz. The goal of the win-win waltz is to reach solutions that please you both. No more aiming to get your way. Aim instead for both of you to feel comfortable with your plan of action.

To do the win-win waltz, notice you have differences, which probably will become evident because you are beginning to argue or to feel hopeless. Express your underlying concerns. Ask about and list to your partner's concerns. Then create a plan of action responsive to the concerns of both of you.

**5. Eliminate the three "As" that ruin marriages.**

Affairs, addictions, and excessive anger are relationship deal-breakers. They are out-of-bounds in a healthy marriage.

If you are indulging in one of these self-defeating and relationship-destroying habits, get the habit out of your life pronto. If your spouse is the one with the problem, trying to learn how to save the marriage may be a mistake. Either build a new kind of marriage where these do not occur, or end the marriage.

**6. Radically increase the positive energies you give your partner.**

Smile more; hug more; have more sex; be more appreciative; spend more time dwelling on the things you like about each other; help each other out more; praise each other more; laugh more; agree more; do more fun things together.

The best things in life really are free. The more positives you give, the more you'll get.

**7. Learn the skills for a successful marriage.**

Would you expect to drive a car without first taking driver's ed? Find books and marriage education courses to learn the communication and conflict resolution skills for marriage partnership.

With this 7-point plan, you'll find that your anger and hopelessness have led to making your marriage a loving success.

# How to Save a Marriage – 32 Experts Share Their Best Advice

## Why am I Writing About How to Save Your Marriage?

I got to thinking about the people who call our offices and then disappear. Or book an initial meeting with us and never become clients.

Where did they go?

If they wanted to save the marriage and didn’t want a divorce, why did they call us or meet with us in the first place? I think it’s pretty clear from our website what we do, isn’t it?

And then it hit me.

They didn’t think there was any other problem-solving strategy or anything they could do to save their failing marriage and avoid divorce. Calling and meeting with us became their option of last resort.

But they were really struggling with that decision and were still in love with their husband or wife.

So I wanted to do something to help, however small.

And that’s how the idea of an expert roundup on how to save a marriage came to be.

## How to Save Your Marriage – The Experts Weigh-In

Since my professional training and expertise is in helping couples peacefully and respectfully separate, and not in keeping them together, I needed some input from those who know best how to save a marriage on the brink of divorce.

So I assembled a list of expert North American marriage counselors, couples therapists, social workers and other related mental health professionals (to whom I am extremely grateful for their generosity of both time and spirit) and posed the following question:

### “If you could offer couples only one piece of advice, tip or guidance on how to save a marriage from divorce, what would it be?”

I asked them to try and keep their replies concise. So each reply could be easily digested (and hopefully acted upon) by you and your spouse.

What follows is a list of the best and most heartfelt pieces of advice I’ve ever read on how to right the ship in difficult times.

I hope you find it helpful.

**Dennis Paget**

[www.headtosoulcounselling.com](http://www.headtosoulcounselling.com/)

One piece of advice I believe on how to save your marriage is to seek help early instead of waiting for contempt, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling to become entrenched in the relationship.

Maybe before marriage, ensure you’ve made a good choice in a partner and do pre-marriage counseling work to get the marriage off to a good start and obtain excellent tools to get over the bumps easier.

In the early stages of a relationship if issues come up, don’t sweep them under the carpet, get to marriage counseling.

Look at marriage no different than acquiring education and a skill set for employment.  It takes work, daily work for harmony, joy and peace.

**Adrienne Levy, LMFT**

[www.adriennelevy.com](http://www.adriennelevy.com/)

Love and trust are vital components to the foundation of a solid marriage that endures.  But love and trust alone are not enough.

When times get tough, and life being what it is, having skills to listen effectively (to yourself and your spouse), manage intense negative emotions well, and communicate in non-blaming or defensive ways, are the tools to navigate life's tougher challenges.

A good therapist can help you assess, and build on, your current strengths and teach, or fine tune, skills you might need for saving your marriage and making your relationship what you want it to be.

## Can You Tell Me How to Save My Marriage?

**Lisa Bissett, M.Ed./Ed.S.**

[www.lisabissett.com](http://www.lisabissett.com/)

My answer is this: according to Dr. John Gottman, roughly 70% of problems in relationships are, by nature, perpetual and unresolvable (e.g., she wants kids but he is infertile). Solve the 30% of marital problems that can be fixed.

For the rest, get help learning how to identify your non-negotiables (e.g., children are a must) as well as your areas of flexibility (e.g., we could adopt).

If roughly 20 sessions of Emotionally Focused Therapy can't help a couple resolve their hurts and get past their differences, then utilize counseling services in order to make the transition [from married to divorced] as smooth and as healthy as possible.

**Stuart Fensterheim, LCSW**

[The Couples Experts](http://www.thecouplesexperts.com/)

Get advice from a qualified couples therapist who can help you address relationship injuries and help you begin the process of repairing your bond.

Be willing to do the work you need to do on yourself and with your partner to connect on a deeper, more vulnerable and more authentic level than ever before.

Create the relationship that you desire with the person you love most in the world.

**Dr. Tony Fiore**

[www.splitornotcounseling.com](http://www.splitornotcounseling.com/)

Prioritize your marriage such that you both put energy and time into it.

A marriage is like a plant. It won’t survive without proper sunshine and watering. You can’t just put it in a corner and expect it to thrive on its own under clouds, nor can you expect it to survive with acid rain.

Put some energy and effort into the relationship, just as you did when you were dating. Even spending just 10 minutes a day together emotionally connecting will often help when it comes to saving a marriage.

This means no television, video games or children during daily connection time. “Connecting” may involve simply talking and sharing, taking a walk together, or doing something together you both enjoy. Just being nice to each other often produces surprising results.

**Donald Goodman, LCSW**

[www.goodmantherapy.com](http://www.goodmantherapy.com/)

I know it is cliché, but marriage is like competing in a marathon.

It is a very long journey so you have to pace yourself. I commonly say you have to jog the marathon and walk the water stations, but keep it moving steadily towards the finish line. Don't be surprised how quickly you can feel disconnected even in a healthy relationship and sometimes it will be right after you believed things were the best they ever were.

I compare marriage to a marathon because doing well requires hard work every day. So don't expect things to get better immediately if you and your significant other have not invested the time into the relationship.

So in a nutshell, be prepared to work on your relationship daily.

## How Do I Save My Marriage from Divorce?

**Irene Schreiner, LMFT**

[www.solidfoundationstherapy.com](http://www.solidfoundationstherapy.com/)

If I’m only able to give one piece of advice it would be to start treating your marriage like a living breathing entity that you are responsible for keeping alive. That may sound weird but we often fail to think about what we can do for our marriage.

We get stuck focusing on the the things that our partner didn’t do for us. We then use that as a justification for us not do good things for our partner. This creates a cycle of hurt and resentment.

If you instead focus on “feeding” your marriage, regardless of what your partner did or didn’t do, it will grow and thrive.

**David Klow, LMFT**

[www.skylightcounselingcenter.com](http://www.skylightcounselingcenter.com/)

Slow down! That would be my advice to a couple who is on the brink of divorce or separation. So many couples rush towards a break-up or divorce rather than taking the time to work through their issues and see what might be possible to save the marriage.

To borrow from a sports metaphor, couples feel better when they “leave it all on the field” before they split. In other words, they are better prepared for life after divorce if they first try everything possible to make the marriage work.

Yet most couples will not even do half of what is possible to save their marriage. People will often think that they have tried everything, but usually they are not even close to the many ways to save a marriage from divorce.

It is often from a lack of imagination, or from feeling discouraged, that couples fall short of finding new possibilities for a life together. Yet I try to offer hope that there are many ways to save the relationship which they might not have even considered.

Couples counseling offers an opportunity to find these new possibilities and create hope for renewal in a marriage.

## Can My Marriage be Saved?

**Dalise Gada**

<http://www.somatictherapyinsac.com/>

I think the most important thing to ask and explore is if each of [you] have ever been really married.

Really. Fully committed. Fully in.

If not, why not? Can't know if you really want a divorce unless you know in your heart you've been really married.

Part two is about what your partner came in to your life to teach you or help you learn about yourself.

Do they know what that is? If not, then [individuals] would benefit by figuring it out and looking deeply at themselves.

They can get divorced, but my experience is they're simply going to attract the same issue with a different face unless they see their part.

**Barbara Baumgardner**

[www.barbarabaumgardner.com](http://www.barbarabaumgardner.com/)

Stop talking about divorce. Instead, put all your resources into saving your marriage.

Get both your heart and your head in the frame of mind that says you are still fully invested in having a wonderful long-term relationship with your spouse.

Once upon a time, you thought that your husband (or wife) was a wonderful partner for you. Rediscover the reasons you thought that was true.

Then think about how long it has taken to get into this difficult spot and recognize that there is no quick fix for something that has taken so long to build.

Find the best marriage counselor you can possibly afford. Meet with the therapist regularly and do the assigned work in between sessions. Life can be good and wonderful together!

**Nate Meeds**

[www.pivotpointe.net](http://www.pivotpointe.net/)

My advice (I can't take full credit for) actually comes from a Harvard Business Review Article titled “Making Relationships Work” which offers the following:

Honor your wife's dreams. Men have a tendency to bulldoze their agenda in relationships which results in the wife feeling unheard and unknown. By honoring her dreams it demonstrates the value that she has and that she brings to the relationship.

Too many husbands couldn't even answer the question of what their wife's dreams are, but are more than happy to insist on their own dreams. Addressing this issue may feel like giving up power within the relationship, but I would argue that it is only power that has been gained...

Note from Joe: this quote can apply to both men and women. As a mediator, I've got to be neutral!

**Mark Sichel, LCSW**

[www.marksichel.com](http://www.marksichel.com/)

A marriage can be saved when two people stop thinking about themselves and their feelings and instead focus on the relationship.

He + She + WE.

When partners focus on the WE, they are doing so because their overriding concern transcends each of them in favor of the relationship.

So end the battle of right and wrong and you'll be able to count on right actions creating all the right feelings to make a marriage work. Stopping the fight is what truly empowers us and creates a win.

The WE wins when neither partner plays the blame game and when being close is more important than being right.

Think of it this way: the WE is the home team, and when the WE wins, each member of the team benefits.

**Agnes Oh, PsyD, LMFT**

[www.dragnesoh.com](http://www.dragnesoh.com/)

Many couples experience relational pain mostly because they are lacking ample knowledge about each other. Irrespective of the number of years they’ve been married or lived together...

There’s nothing more painful than not feeling heard, understood, or validated in an intimate relationship with someone we love and care about. Sometimes, familiarity begets apathy.

The best antidote to growing callousness is to rekindle curiosity about each other. Surprisingly, many couples have not taken the time to get to know each other more deeply via proactively consistent efforts. More often than not, conflict emerges from not knowing completely which invariably leads to misunderstanding.

As [couples and a therapist] work together, [they] are jointly unraveling this shocking mystery. If and when couples are willing to invest necessary time and patience in allowing this process to unfold, a new possibility can transpire.

What was once construed as irreconcilable differences could be turned into a transformative opportunity to learn and reconnect at a whole different level of empathy and understanding.

This learning process alone can be truly eye-opening for many couples and can be instrumental in how to save a failing marriage by inviting them to a new chapter of their relationship.

**Marc Sadoff MSW, BCD**

[www.realhope.com](http://www.realhope.com/)

It is defensiveness that broadcasts a lack of power. When each person is trying to get the other understand their point of view, the arguing rarely ceases.

Seek first to understand others before seeking understanding for yourself.

So, you be the first to hit these 3 points BEFORE you ask the other to listen to your explanations or reasons and point of view.

The Power Response sounds like this:

1. Own what you said or did first. (ie. Yes, I was shouting… )
2. Acknowledge the other’s thoughts or feelings. ( i.e. It makes sense you’d think or feel... )
3. Make amends and say what you’re going to do about it. (ie. I’m sorry. I’ll be mindful of that.)

**Karen Focht, MA, LMFT**

[www.fochtfamilypractice.com](http://www.fochtfamilypractice.com/)

A relationship is made up of a system that requires change from both partners. When each person is solely focused on what is needed from the other, it is hard to break a problematic sequence.

Rather than holding a primary focus on what is lacking from your partner, work towards looking within yourself towards positive change and growth.

**Justin Tobin, LCSW**

[www.jtobintherapist.com](http://www.jtobintherapist.com/)

You both have to be honest with yourselves.

First, take an honest appraisal of what you can offer to the marriage as well as what you are asking from your partner. If you want to make this work, there must be a commitment to doing the work.

This includes re-learning the meaning of trust. It is not enough to point your finger at your partner and exclaim, “Why don’t you trust me?”

Ask yourself the question how much you trust your partner. Usually, you both want the same thing.

Allow yourself to trust them more and you will feel them trusting you more.  There will be – and should be – ups and downs to get to a healthier relationship.

So, don’t stop working on your relationship simply because the work gets to be too hard. Bottom line, each partner needs to keep working on themselves.

If you trust that you both are doing this, saving your marriage can succeed.

## Can One Person Save a Marriage?

**Peggy Hinders, LPC, NBCC**

[www.mmhcounseling.com](http://www.mmhcounseling.com/)

One of the biggest changes I suggest is to have more goals for yourself then you do for your spouse. Amazing how that works…

In fact, it's changes made by just one of the spouses that brings about marital change. Of course it depends on the issues, but even with infidelity couples, I've seen this work.

Again, my advice to the one who wants to save the marriage is to work on self and get back to the essence of who they are with no expectations of their spouse.

At the very least, the person going at it alone can choose to address their personal issues and grow as a result. Those positive changes can often begin to challenge the mate’s perspective and create hope for saving the marriage.

**Kelly Montgomery, LMFT**

[www.healinghappenstherapy.com](http://www.healinghappenstherapy.com/)

If I only had one piece of guidance to offer you if you're looking for ways to save your marriage it would be to ask yourself: "How am I responsible?" It takes two for things to work and for things to get stuck in repetitive unhealthy patterns.

Often times, couples will blame each other or sense a stalemate or block [with] no way to move forward. If each spouse takes the time to recognize, name, and put action towards their part in the cycle, it can’t help but change the way things are unfolding.

This often takes a professional help to see through the triggers and emotions, but once labeled, it’s a whole lot easier to see how things went wrong and therefore how to fix it.

We typically aren't capable of figuring it out ourselves seeing as we are in the middle of it, so calling a therapist is a great idea to see whether your marriage is salvageable. I right away look for both parties willing to take some responsibility.

**Tatiana Sean M.Ed. C.C.C.**

Sometimes one person or even both partners feel there is no hope and feel counseling is a waste of time, especially if one spouse refuses to attend.

I strongly recommend counseling but not with the view of “fixing” the other person. They should approach it with the idea to learn about themselves and see their marriage as an experience contributing to their growth…We need to learn to be happy with ourselves (which takes a lifetime) and not expect others to make us happy.

Often when people fall in love, they show their best qualities and decide to marry based on these. People should also see the flaws of each other and more importantly accept them.

I think fear is a major source of how people react especially with those they are most intimate with and marriage is one the of most intimate experience bringing out our most vulnerable selves.

I also think we give up easily as we live in a disposable society where things are constantly replaced. We learn in our family of origin how to be in relationships and often we take these patterns into other relationships including marriage.

**Farah Hussain Baig, LCSW**

<http://www.innervoicepc.com/>

Transparency and accountability are paramount to maintaining or “saving” a marriage. Both involve trust and self-reflection, qualities which often require us to check our pride at the door.

In order to maintain trust in a marriage, each partner needs to not only be honest, but transparent. Couples will at times claim “honesty” even with the omission of details, thoughts, and feelings, potentially damaging the marital bond.

Transparency, on the other hand, requires a couple to share openly and honestly on multiple levels, allowing for vulnerability with the hope of creating a deeper sense of intimacy. This type of intimacy will not only help maintain a healthy relationship but also repair one as well.

True intimacy involves self-reflection and transparency, both of which play a role in accountability. Self-reflection occurs when each partner can honestly, without pride, examine their thoughts and behaviors and take ownership for their intentions and possible “wrong-doing.” If one or both members of a couple are incapable of doing this, a marriage cannot move forward in a healthy way.

Silent discontent breeds resentment, distance, and marital discord. Be proactive in maintaining the health of your marriage, it will be worth the time and effort every time.

**Denise Ambre, LCSW**

[www.ambreassociates.com](http://www.ambreassociates.com/)

I think that the one piece of advice I would give to a couple working toward saving a marriage is to start paying attention to the TONE with which that say things to each other.

Someone can say all the right words, but if their tone is condescending or flippant or disrespectful in some way, the words won't mean a thing.

I have noticed in my work that the couples who stay together speak to each other in a gentle and respectful tone of voice. They say "please" and "thank you" to each other and genuinely appreciate what the other brings to the relationship.

**Dr. Rae Mazzei**

[www.evolutionsbh.com](http://www.evolutionsbh.com/)

By the time couples are [contemplating divorce](https://www.equitablemediation.com/blog/should-i-get-a-divorce), they may be experiencing failed communication, including frequent arguments or avoidance of each other. However, many partners are still hopeful that they can save their marriage.

As a couple’s therapist, my one piece of advice is to keep communication open. In particular, be willing to validate your partner’s experience, listen, compromise, and attempt to foster empathy with your partner.

Think about when the relationship was thriving and how you both communicated best. Try to avoid language filled with contempt, hurtful, defensive and argumentative comments.

Changing communication styles is not easy - however, if you are both willing to commit to your relationship, it’s not only essential, but possible to save your marriage.

**Dr. Corinne Scholtz, LMFT**

[www.connectedliving-fl.com](http://www.connectedliving-fl.com/)

My advice to couples who are considering a divorce is to realize that a series of small decisions over a long period of time led to the disconnect, and that new small positive decisions can lead to a greater sense of connectedness.

Small positive decisions taken on a daily basis include refraining from criticizing your spouse, and instead, letting your spouse know one thing you appreciate about them.

Critiquing, judging, comparing your spouse leads to a breakdown in trust and an increase in defensiveness.

Practice mindfulness and 'catch' the negative thoughts before they leave your mouth!

**Angela Pallan, Relationship Counsellor**

[surreydeltafamilycounselling.ca](http://surreydeltafamilycounselling.ca/)

We can all agree that marriage is full of fun and amazing times together, yet it most definitely has its challenges as well.

A piece of advice I would give clients on how to save a marriage on the brink of divorce is to make sure they communicate the best they can. Effective communication is key to a healthy relationship.

However, if the couple reaches a point in their lives where they feel they just can’t move forward, my advice is to reach out to a martial therapist. I know a lot of couple’s use counselling as a last resort, but if both individuals are genuinely willing to make it work, then counselling can help.

Through counselling, the therapist can assist couples to recognize some of their differences or gridlocked conflicts, as they move from being stuck in a situation with continuous arguments into a more healthier and effective manner of communicating with one another.

Couples may have better results of communicating in the presence of a counsellor who can direct the individuals to move forward from the same conversation and help come up with some reasonable compromises/ solutions.

Through marital or couple therapy, the counsellor can help the couple increase effective communication skills, assist in looking at each other’s perspective, discuss what makes a relationship work and what a healthy relationship looks like, help identify specific problems and dynamics of the relationship, understand gridlocked conflicts, and help establish interventions and strategies that will help strengthen conflict management skills.

## "Is There a Way for How to Save My Marriage after an Infidelity?"

**Karleen Nevery, MTC, CPA**

[www.kitsilanolife.ca](http://www.kitsilanolife.ca/)

Often families are ripped apart when an affair is discovered, even when the extramarital relationship was insignificant and short lived. Children grow up believing one of their parents is unworthy or bad because their parent’s divorce is blamed on adultery.

What if it was the combination of action and reaction that led to the divorce and the family missed the opportunity for growth and forgiveness? Perhaps the wound infidelity inflicted could have been healed if the betrayed partner had been more curious about their partner and the dynamic they co-created before the partner strayed.

It may be beneficial to enter counseling to learn what emotional need the partner was trying to meet in such a harmful way.

I would propose we avoid words such as “cheating” from conversations about infidelity. It can result in the stigmatization of a human being without trying to understand them more deeply.

If your world has been rocked by your partner’s infidelity, this is very difficult time for you. You may need to take time to gain more understanding before moving into a divorce process that could unravel your family.

Take a pause and be open to deepening your commitment in the face of this shocking realization.

**Kristy Higgins, MTC, RCS**

[www.kristyhiggins.com](http://www.kristyhiggins.com/)

Contemplating separation and divorce can be an extremely confusing time. It can be tempting to blame your spouse for the unhappiness, hurt, resentments and loneliness you feel inside.

Racing thoughts of whether to leave or stay, focusing on all the parts of the relationship you are dissatisfied with can create an intense fight or flight reaction…Your mind may start to race with thoughts of something being wrong with your relationship, your partner or yourself, creating confusion and distress.

What if I told you these are the signals of transformation and change? An opportunity to enhance closeness, connection and intimacy between you and your spouse?

Knowing whether or not you are in the fight or flight response is essential in determining when to make a decision or not.

I often recommend consulting with a professional to gain insight and understanding around the issue triggering your reaction.

Taking time to fully understand this will bring the clarity you desire and provide the answers you seek, so any decision made is from a calm, clear state leaving the dignity of you, your partner and your family intact.

## How Can I Save My Marriage?

**Cheryl Dillon, CPC, ELI-MP**

[Divorce Coach](https://www.equitablemediation.com/meet-the-team/cheryl-dillon-divorce-coach) & Equitable Mediation Co-Founder

In today's stressful modern world, we have a lot on our plates.

Demands from work, financial pressures, and even friends and family can drain us of our energy until we have nothing left to give to ourselves, let alone others.

It's not uncommon when we feel drained of our energy to not be at our personal best. And when we're not at our best, without realizing it, we may be taking our frustrations about our own life out on others, including our spouse.

The best advice I could give to someone trying to save a marriage is to notice what patterns of negative events in their outside world trigger negative events in their "inside world."

Pay attention to the circumstances that precipitate any fights you have with your spouse. You may start to notice the same things triggering you each and every time.

If you can become aware of those triggers, you can begin to manage and hopefully work to eliminate them, either on your own or with the help of a good therapist or coach, which will lead to an improved attitude and sense of self.

And ultimately, a new level of closeness in your marriage.

**Lyndsey Frasier, MA, LMFT, CST**

[www.relationalconnections.com](http://www.relationalconnections.com/)

Relational patterns often lead to unhappy marriages. I encourage you to become aware of these cycles.

When you are aware, you can change your relationships. A simple pattern that is common is getting defensive when your partner is critical. It is an automatic response you give without much thought. In marriages there are many of these automatic responses, where both partners are responsible.

It is not the individuals in the couple that are the problem but instead how you both relate. If you are not aware of these patterns you continue to engage in behavior that lead to frustrations.

I encourage you to become aware of these cycles. When you are become aware you can than implement a slightly different response.

When you choose to implement something different, you will find that your partner also responds differently, as you have broken the automatic cycle.

When you do something different, you can then both start to make changes that lead to a satisfying relationship.

## Can a Marriage be Saved?

**Claudia Rosen, LCSW**

[www.claudiarosenpsychotherapy.com](http://www.claudiarosenpsychotherapy.com/)

One piece of advice for how to save a failing marriage would be to understand that in moments of love we see ourselves as perfectly suited for each other, and when we are questioning our marriage we notice all our differences.

The challenge of a good marriage is to learn how to honor and respect those differences to find your constant connection in spite of the differences that you have as individuals.

All good marriages have enormous respect in them and that respect is for individuality – the individuality of each spouse’s feelings, thoughts and experiences.

**John Taylor, Registered Psychotherapist/Clinical Counsellor**

[www.izumitherapy.com](http://www.izumitherapy.com/)

Learn to repair. Repairing is a re-connective act needed after any disconnect or fight, big or small... Take turns going through the following steps, avoiding blaming, criticism, and defensiveness. Repair only works if both partners go through each step:

1. **List your feelings during the disagreeable incident**. Don’t tell each other why you felt that way, as that becomes blame.
2. **Describe your reality**. As objectively as possible, describe what went on for you. For the person listening, don’t try to correct the sequence of events. Listen to understand (not to respond). You will have a chance to describe your reality when you switch places.
3. **Describe your triggers**: Rewind your memory to describe a time prior to your marriage when you felt this way. A trigger is what set you up for overreacting. You are just getting more information to yourself and your partner about your emotional system.
4. **Take Responsibility**: Both partners need to take responsibility for the fight or disconnect. It is saying “This is what I did to make that fight worse.” This step can include an apology if one is needed.
5. **Positive Plan**: Describe what you could do differently the next time you are in a similar situation, in a positive way, so that the relationship is affirmed, needs are met, and the fight is avoided.

**Susan Armitage, M.Div., RMFT, CAMS**

[www.overthewallsofanger.com](http://www.overthewallsofanger.com/)

Gaining skills at making up is crucial to lasting happiness.

I see couples who fight like two dogs after one bone, and couples who distance because of wrong priorities. I see couples who bear the interference of in-laws, the pain of addictions, or the betrayal of an affair.

The couples who have the greatest chance of surviving are the ones who can rapidly repair their relationship by knowing how to reconnect emotionally despite the challenges.

Fighting for connection solidifies relationships whereas the opposite allows them to fade away.

**Edward Riddick**

[www.celebratemarriage.us](http://www.celebratemarriage.us/)

You married your love. The excitement of your relationship has worn off. You’ve encountered perpetual challenges and struggles which you’ve worked hard to overcome.

You are stuck in the "crazy cycle" and have almost given up hope…

Your yearning for a loving connection is possible. Your relationship can be repaired if… you are both ‘in’, [you both] seek help from a marriage counselor you trust who is solution and emotion focused, and [you both] attend a marriage conference together.

## So There You Have It! Expert Advice on How to Save a Marriage

If you found even one piece of advice shared by our experts helpful, I'm really glad.

And I hope what you've gathered from this article is that saving your marriage from divorce takes a lot of work, requires time and commitment from both spouses, and it won't happen overnight.

**But it is possible!**

# Seven Things Catholics Should Know about Divorce

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/seven-things-catholics-should-know-about-divorce/>

The institution of marriage is in trouble today. The divorce rate is anywhere from 50 percent for first marriages to 80 percent for subsequent marriages. Perhaps, as a result, more and more couples are choosing to live together without bothering to get married.

The Catholic Church’s response has been to get proactive about better preparing engaged couples before they marry. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage has made strengthening Catholic marriages a top priority.

My own Diocese of Phoenix and other dioceses around the country are revisiting their marriage requirements, lengthening preparation periods and examining couples closely, looking for trouble spots in their relationships and families of origin—indications that they may not be ready for the vocation of marriage just yet.

As a divorced Catholic, I am happy to hear about the Church’s new vigilance. But what is the Church doing for us? Annulling past marriages and saying, in effect, “We hope you do better next time,” is hardly adequate. Many parishes offer post-divorce workshops designed for the first months after a divorce. But the pain of divorce goes on for many years.

The Church—the institution as well as the individuals—needs to minister to the millions of divorced Catholics by both changing ingrained attitudes and reaching out in love. Yes, the Church is and should be pro-marriage, but, like its Lord, it must also love and support those whose marriages have failed. It’s a fine line to walk, but it is necessary.

As the survivor of divorce after 30 years of marriage, I know there needs to be a healthier dialogue within the Catholic Church between those who have never divorced (including our clergy) and those who have. Here are seven things you may not know about divorce:

### 1) Non-divorced Catholics often come across as judgmental of the divorced.

Perhaps they don’t mean to. But there is a definite, although largely unconscious, attitude in the Church that the divorced are less spiritual, less committed to marriage and/or less forgiving than the long-term married.

Non-divorced Catholics need to be careful of assumptions, to discard any trace of judgment toward the divorced. Since I have “been there, done that” when it comes to being judgmental, I can address this issue personally. It is too easy for those who have never experienced the desperation and sorrow of a failed marriage to believe that “they could have done something to save it.”

Let me assure you, the divorced Catholics I know (including myself) are spiritual, forgiving people who are committed to family and to the institution of marriage. And they did all they could to save their marriages. It is time for all of us in the Church to stop judging the divorced.

### 2) Not every marriage was ‘joined by God’ even if it took place in a church.

This may seem like a rationalization, but Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:6 (“Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate”) does not apply to all marriages. Many of us, looking back, realize that God was simply not a part of our decision to marry. In my case, I never asked God, never gave God the chance to stop my headlong (and headstrong) determination to get married. And God was trying to get my attention.

There were real problems. My intended was heading to a war zone for a year, and friends and family counseled me to wait. But I would not listen.

We have all attended enough weddings to recall what the priest or deacon always asks a couple at the beginning of the marriage ceremony: “Do you come here freely and without reservation?” For most of us divorced Catholics, the answer to that question, if we had been truthful, was “no.” How can anyone claim that a particular marriage was “joined by God” if that was not the intention of the parties getting married?

### 3) The divorced do not have to justify themselves.

Even if a divorcing/divorced person is very close to you, you do not know what really happened. Therefore, you should refrain from making comments or asking prying questions. Perhaps we divorced Catholics are overly sensitive, but certain statements and inquiries are like rubbing salt into a very sore wound.

I have been asked, “Did you try counseling or Retrouvaille?” as though I would smack my head and say, “Gee, why didn’t I think of that?”

Yes, I tried everything I could think of.

“Why can’t you just forgive him?” is another gem, to which I answer that forgiveness is not the same as a pardon. People have commented, “But you seemed like such a happy couple.” That’s what we wanted you to think; that’s what we wanted to believe.

The bottom line is this: Such questions and comments just hurt, and they are unfair. If a divorcing/divorced person does not want to confide in you, do not prod him/her to tell you what happened. Just love that person. And give him/her the benefit of the doubt that he/she tried everything to make the marriage work.

There are a variety of reasons why marriages fail. The “big three” most of us think of are adultery, addiction and abuse, but the real reason behind most failed marriages is simple indifference, often on the part of one spouse. There is no way a husband or wife can save a marriage single-handedly. When a marriage fails, no amount of  effort, enabling or denial will save it.

It is wrong to ask for details before you support your divorced friend, family member or parishioner. People should not have to justify their actions before they are loved for who they are.

### 4) Divorce has changed my life for the better.

Many other divorced Catholics can say the same. Divorce has released me spiritually, mentally and emotionally to become the person God created me to be. I have been able to move on to a life that is fuller, happier and more creative.

The most important change is this: My relationship with God is better today than it ever has been. When I was freed from an impossible, dysfunctional marriage, my relationship with God blossomed. I had some initial worries about my spiritual status when I began the process, but God quickly reassured and comforted me as I went through and beyond my divorce.

The psychological counseling and spiritual direction I received during my divorce made me a healthier person than I ever was before. I have worked through the deep problems caused by my dysfunctional childhood. I have faced and forgiven everyone who helped shape my early years in negative ways. And I understand and embrace my individuality. Yes, divorce was a painful passage to go through, but I am a better person today because of it.

### 5) I don’t need to marry again to be happy.

I get a lot of comments, concern and advice about finding someone when people learn I have been divorced for eight years. I really am happy as a single person, and not at all lonely or bitter about the past because I choose to remain single.

I understood right from the beginning of my new life as a single person that, in order to be happy in a new relationship, I would have to be happy just being me and being single. My attitude now is, “If it happens, it happens.” In the meantime, please accept that I am fine as a single person. And for goodness’ sake: Don’t try to fix me up with anyone!

### 6) I hope my divorce makes you question assumptions about your marriage.

Does that shock you? It shouldn’t. It means that I love you and I love the institution of marriage. But healthy marriages don’t just happen. I was sure my marriage would never end. At the same time, I was unaware of what makes a healthy marriage and very much in denial about our problems.

My marital problems went a lot deeper than most, but every marriage needs constant care. And every marriage can use a tune-up now and then: a few counseling sessions, a Marriage Encounter weekend or a retreat together. Marriage takes a lot of work.

I am delighted when friends and co-workers tell me that watching what I went through eight years ago or hearing me talk now about my divorce compelled them to take a second look at their own marriages, strengthen what was weak and recommit themselves to the relationship. The divorced have a great deal to teach the married about what a good, healthy and Christian marriage really is.

### 7) Every marriage ends.

The marriage covenant ends when this life ends. Jesus tells us in Luke 20:34-35 that there is no marriage in heaven. Marriage is an earthly institution with a heavenly purpose. Marriage is a training ground wherein we cosmic youngsters learn about the love that has existed from all eternity within the Holy Trinity.

Its purpose is to train us to give up our selfish tendencies, to care for another as we would care for ourselves, to take our place in the Kingdom of God. Marriage is a foreshadowing of our eternal relationship with God and with one another. Marriage is a wonderful thing, but it is not a forever thing. Knowing and remembering that should deepen not only the relationship with your earthly spouse, but also your love for your heavenly spouse, Jesus.

As a divorced Catholic, I have taken great comfort from the story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well (John 4:4-42). This poor woman had been married five times and was now living with yet another man. That’s a lot of failed relationships—even by today’s standards!

Jesus’ tenderness toward her and his sympathy for her situation are apparent. Did he deliberately go to that spot at that unlikely time of day because he knew she would be drawing water then? Did he send the disciples away to get lunch in the town so he could talk to her alone? I don’t doubt it.

Jesus never spoke to this woman or any other hurting person in ways that increased their pain. He offered this divorcée “living water,” himself, which was what she had been searching for in all her relationships.

It is time for the rest of the Catholic Church to do the same.

## Divorce and the Catholic Church

The first thing Catholics should know is that divorce is not a sin that should keep a divorced Catholic from receiving the sacraments. A divorced or separated person is not excommunicated and is still a Catholic in good standing. The only reason for excommunication after divorce is remarriage without going through the annulment process.

Before a divorced person can remarry in the Catholic Church, he or she must obtain an annulment by a Catholic diocesan tribunal. Obtaining such a decree does not mean that the marriage never took place; it is a determination that a sacramental marriage did not take place.

This does not mean that the children of that marriage are illegitimate or that the couple was “living in sin.” It means that, in that particular case, the marrying couple had little or no idea what Christian marriage was all about or that there were deep problems from the beginning of the marriage, either in the couple’s relationship or in their families of origin.

Therefore, the Church may determine that it was impossible then for the couple to enter into a truly Christian marriage. Divorced Catholics who are seeking an annulment should talk to their pastors, who will direct them to the proper contacts at their diocese.

The annulment process can give divorced Catholics three gifts:

**CLARITY**, by helping them see the why’s and how’s of their failed marriage in a new light.

**HEALING**, by allowing them to work through their anger and guilt and come through to a better place spiritually and emotionally.

**TIME**, by forcing the divorced person to wait before making any more relationship decisions.

Recently divorced people are especially vulnerable to needing companionship, support and sympathy. The first person of the opposite sex who provides that is going to be very attractive, but the newly divorced person does not need that kind of complication in the healing process. The newly divorced person needs breathing room after a marriage ends.

The dismal divorce statistics after second and third marriages are proof that too many divorced people simply don’t wait long enough to recover completely. Taking part in the Catholic Church’s annulment process is one way to ensure that a good healing process has begun. If a divorced Catholic does meet someone he or she might want to marry, that person will not only have better tools for discerning whether this is a good relationship, but will also have the Church’s blessing on a second marriage.