



Marriage matters

Whether you're living together or only thinking about it (or wondering if you ever would if the right person came into your life), it's important for you to consider your expectations and whether or not they are realistic. The questions worth asking—and answering—are: Does living together actually *work*? Does it create a *more fulfilling and satisfying* relationship? If you later get married, will living together have made your marriage *better*?

Because living together (by sexually active couples) has become more common over the past 40–50 years, there has been plenty of opportunity for sociologists to study its effects on relationships and on the family unit, and the results could not be clearer: living together is often bad for marriage and it's an unstable (sometimes even dangerous) environment for kids. The rates for divorce, domestic violence, child abuse, and poverty *all* increase (statistically) among living-together households, compared to married households.

A marriage license is more than just a “piece of paper.” The license symbolizes not only a legal union, but also a covenant made by two people before God (and generally before many family members and friends). Couples that live together then later get married are statistically more likely to end the relationship in divorce. And children of couples who live together (even when both man and woman are the biological parents of the children) are more likely to experience abuse and neglect.

There’s no simple formula for a successful relationship, be it marriage or living together. You were created to be in relationship with other people, and your body itself was designed to couple with a person of the opposite sex. Your desire for relationship and oneness with another person is normal and it’s good!

But there is strong evidence that living together, instead of getting married, puts a couple at a considerable disadvantage and puts their children at risk.

Marriage takes discipline, self-sacrifice, and a commitment to the good of the other person. These challenges are what make a marriage stable and secure over time. Living together establishes a couple and their children not on a bedrock foundation but on ever-shifting sand.