

HELPING MARRIAGES IN DIFFICULTIES



Just as a church needs to proclaim the message that **every marriage needs enhancement**, it needs to say from time to time that **every couple experiencing difficulties needs to seek help early**. The vast majority of couples seek help as a last resort, and many leave it too late.

Recent research has shown no evidence that unhappily married adults who divorced were typically any happier than unhappily married people who stayed married. Even more dramatically, researchers also found that two-thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported that their marriages were happy five years later. In addition, the most unhappy marriages reported the most dramatic turnarounds. Full details can be found in "Does Divorce Make People Happier?" by Linda J Waite and others, Institute for American Values 2002.

Earlier research has shown that it is better for their children if parents who are having difficulties remain together (unless there is violence), rather than if they divorce (e.g. The Exeter Family Study - Family Breakdown and Its Impact On Children, Monica Cockett and John Tripp, University of Exeter Press)

Every church needs to know how to provide or find help for married couples in difficulties. It would be good if many more churches could develop simple means of giving help themselves, as well as knowing where further help can be found for those with deeper problems. This paper describes what could be done.

Book

A book giving practical and effective advice for couples in difficulties is "**The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage**" by Michele Wiener-Davis, published by Simon & Schuster - ISBN: 0684873540, paperback from www.amazon.co.uk (often arrives next day).

Don't go, or send your friends, to a marriage counsellor until you've read this book. Michele Wiener-Davis has established a track record as the leading divorce buster in the US, and almost all the book is equally applicable in the UK. It is the book for you if you want to help friends who are in trouble. It is the book for you if your own marriage is in trouble and you want to save it. It is even the book for those whose spouse has actually moved out or is having an affair.

The book's unashamed goal is to get a marriage back better than ever. It offers real hope and a clear plan that has worked for many others. The seven steps are easy to understand and the author illustrates them well with true stories. The book has so much to say when only one spouse wants to put things back together. That's the reality much of the time. How can I change MY attitude and MY behaviour? Follow these seven steps.

The book begins by helping a reader understand the reality of divorce and the ongoing problems it brings. Divorce should be avoided by everyone who can possibly do so. The book concludes with special chapters about Infidelity, Dealing with a Depressed Spouse, Surviving His Mid-Life Crisis, Overcoming Passion Meltdown and with a chapter of testimonies.

As the book is secular there is about 1% with which Christians will disagree, but do not be put off by that. This book has saved many marriages in America and has enormous potential for saving marriages in Britain. Counsellors need copies to lend to those on their waiting lists.

The advice is simple, clear, pro-marriage and based on sound evidence of what works and what does not.

Questionnaires

Another method of helping marriages in difficulties is to do an **ENRICH Inventory** (Questionnaire) with a PREPARE/ENRICH Practitioner, or a **REFOCCUS Inventory** with a FOCCUS Facilitator. Each spouse does their own and these are then analysed to find the couple's strengths and the areas in which they need to grow. These are discussed with the Practitioner/Facilitator in one or more further sessions. See the PREPARE website www.prepare-enrich.co.uk and the FOCCUS website www.affinities.org.uk PREPARE have a special Inventory for the Over 50s called MATE. These inventories are all based on considerable research.

The inventories are applicable to people of any cultural background and are therefore relevant for those in cross-cultural marriages.

Intensive Help for Marriages in Crisis

Intimate Life Ministries offer this in two ways: an intensive residential retreat in a small group setting, lasting three days, or a mini-intensive for one couple lasting 24 hours. The cost to the couples reflects the high level of care provided, both in the residential facilities and the personal attention received. These opportunities are offered to help facilitate significant healing and restoration. Follow-up support will also be offered.

Although based on Christian principles, those who do not share the Christian faith can also benefit.

Marriage Intensive Run several times a year from Friday morning until Sunday afternoon in pleasant surroundings in the Midlands, with excellent meals and comfortable rooms. Four couples will usually participate with the leaders.

Mini-Intensive 24 hours (lunchtime to lunchtime) one to one attention in comfortable and relaxing surroundings, individually arranged, with follow-up support.

For further details contact Mrs Christine Mort, Centre for Relational Care, Warwick Gates Community, Heathcote, Warwick CV34 6DZ Email: JLMinUK@aol.com

Retrouvaille

The word "Retrouvaille" simply means rediscovery. It is Roman Catholic in origin but is open to all of any faith or none. It is a live-in weekend and post-weekend programme for couples. It offers the chance to rediscover yourself, your spouse and your relationship. The emphasis is on a technique of communication between husband and wife. See the website: www.retrouvaille.org.uk for more details and/or use their freephone 08000 327 858 or email them at info@retrouvaille.org.uk.

Couples in Crisis – Family Matters York

Family Matters York have developed a process in which volunteer support couples may be assigned to couples whose relationship is in crisis but who wish to pursue the option of staying together. This would be for an initial period of six weekly meetings.

The support couples will be those who have had experience of working through significant difficulties in their own marriage. They offer mentoring, not counselling. For further details email lynden@fmy.org.uk

Video

Divorce Care provide an American video and workbook pack "**Choosing Wisely Before You Divorce**". The video sessions cover Legal and Financial Implications, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Effects of Divorce, the Many Effects on Children, Forgiveness, Reconciliation. The course is overtly Christian. The first video is only partly relevant in the UK because the US legal system is different, but the other four are equally applicable here. One UK organisation that has used it has saved six out of seven marriages. It can be ordered from Merrily Richie, 57a Windsor Road, Forest Gate, London E7 0QY.

Website

There is **further advice** for couples with marriage difficulties on the website www.bcft.co.uk

Counselling

Happy the church which has in its vicinity a Christian counselling organisation offering marriage counselling, or at least a private Christian counsellor.

Many local counselling organisations, which offer marriage counselling with Christian values, are listed in Marriage Resource's Directory, which is continually updated and published on this website

It is **most important** to ascertain that a counsellor is married (or widowed) and will definitely seek to help an individual or couple restore their marriage.

There is great advantage in counsellors using the REFOCCUS or ENRICH inventories, mentioned above, close to the outset of counselling. This will enable the counsellors to discover most of the issues between the couple much quicker than in a series of counselling sessions.

The inventories will show a couple their strengths as well as the areas which are in conflict. It would be best for them to discuss their strengths first so as to encourage them by reminding them of what they do well and enjoy together, before tackling other areas

Counsellor Training

Marriage Resource also recognise a Marriage Counsellor Training Course, through which couples who have done a general foundation counselling course can be trained to do marriage counselling, e.g. over a series of Saturdays. Such a course would be best put on by a large church, or a Marriage Resource Branch or a Christian counselling organisation, with invitations to all other interested churches and Christian counselling organisations within reach, inviting them to send couples for training. This has already been done successfully several times. The course is designed to train married couples to counsel other couples together and has been produced by a former Marriage Resource Trustee:-

- **Family College Intermediate Marriage Counselling Course** recognised by the Open Colleges Network for two credits at Level 2 or 3. 60 hours. Trainers need to have a City and Guilds Certificate in Further Education (Cse 730). Details from Dennis Colby, 4 Parkgate Close, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7LU Tel: 020 8546 0683

Marriage Resource also recommends two other counselling courses:-

- **King's Communications** have developed a **counselling course** based on the Texas based Intimate Life Ministries materials. The 'Keeping Marriage Healthy' counselling programme is accredited by ILM. This is usually run as a 20 hour course. Details from Andy Croall, King's Communications, P O Box 129, High Wycombe HP13 6FP. Tel: 01494 512441 Email: ukoffice@kingscommunications.com Andy and Dot Croall lead the course.
- **The Institute of Counselling Marriage and Family Counselling Correspondence Course** takes the form of 10 assignments as case study scenarios, with a personal tutor, taking 6 - 9 months to complete. Further details from the Institute at 6 Dixon Street, Glasgow G1 4AX. Tel: 0141 204 2230 Email: iofcounsel@aol.com

A helpful paperback on counselling, including marriage counselling, is published by Mission to Marriage, "**To Bind Up The Broken Hearted**" by Mike Sheldon and Dave Ames, supplied direct from Mission to Marriage, Allt Goch, Penegoes, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8UW.

Prayer Counselling

Another approach to counselling is prayer counselling; training days in this are run by St Andrew's Church, 37 Quickley Lane, Chorleywood, Herts WD3 5PD Tel: 01923 282866.

Marriage Enhancement

We are indebted to Lone Wright of Christian Marriage Ministries, formerly Mission to Marriage, for pointing out that a couple having counselling can benefit through marriage enhancement at the same time particularly through a residential marriage weekend. She wrote in an article in Accord (the magazine of the Association of Christian Counsellors) 'For

couples already receiving counselling a weekend works very well as a supplement offering couples an opportunity to go over issues in a new environment. For many couples, attending a weekend as a follow up to counselling really consolidates the issues addressed in the counselling room. Many couples comment on how helpful it is to come away from their usual routine and concentrate on each other. The relevant teaching and the approach, which focuses on how to put the teaching into practice, is found to be both very helpful and highly practical.'

She also commends marriage enhancement as helpful to counsellors themselves.

Alpha Courses

Although Alpha Courses are designed to help people come to faith in Jesus Christ, they do also help to restore couples' marriages. A story in Alpha News told of one such marriage saved through an Alpha Course, and that after a couple had been married 47 years. Other stories of marriages healed through Alpha have been told

First Aid

Marriage First Aid arose from the discovery that most people with marriage difficulties confide first in a friend, relation or colleague at work, rather than a counsellor, minister, doctor or other professional. Marriage First Aid is a training session to give anyone, married or single, Christian or of other faith or none, some first ideas about how to help a friend who confides about marriage difficulties. The training session centres around a booklet written by Eric Bird of Family College, which is given to each participant. Details of how to run the session on an evening can also be found on this website. You will need a speaker or a couple, who have some experience of helping with marriage problems, to lead the evening. Participants are encouraged to refer their friends to one of the methods above for help at greater depth if First Aid is not enough.

Prayer

All ministry to those in difficulties should be undergirded with prayer. Couples whose marriages are markedly improved should be invited to share their testimonies to encourage others to seek support or counselling.

See also the page on this website: **“Insecurity and Children of Divorce”**