

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.

Website

If you google **Choosing wisely before you divorce** you will find a range of American pages which are worth examining. Although American divorce law differs widely from British, the other parts of the material are most helpful.

There are several other similar helpful websites - google Preventing Divorce and you will find them.

First Aiding

Marriage First Aiding 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 Aiding 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, 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 below for help at greater depth if First Aiding is not enough.

Questionnaires

Another method of helping marriages in difficulties is to do an **ENRICH Inventory** (Questionnaire) with a PREPARE/ENRICH 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 Facilitator in one or more further sessions. See the PREPARE website www.prepare-enrich.co.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.

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 marriage. The emphasis is on a technique of communication between husband and wife. See the website: www.retrouvaille.org.uk for more details and/or phone 07973 380443 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 info@fmy.org.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 Association of Christian Counsellors' Directory, which is continually updated www.acc-uk.org

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 ENRICH questionnaire, 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 questionnaire 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

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,

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

A couple having counselling can benefit through marriage enhancement at the same time, particularly through a residential marriage weekend. In an article in *Accord* (the magazine of the Association of Christian Counsellors) Lone Wright wrote: '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 an Alpha News told of one such marriage saved through an Alpha Course, after a couple had been married 47 years! Other stories of marriages healed through Alpha have been told.

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**"