

Navigating uncharted seas of matrimony

With all the focus on romance in our culture, brides to be and grooms can see themselves as romantic leads in the movie of their lives, with *The Wedding Day* as a box-office smash and *Living Happily Ever After* as the blockbuster sequel.

Preparing for the wedding is one thing, but how can we prepare ourselves for marriage itself?

Pre-marriage counselling may sound rather threatening, but it's actually an excellent idea. It will help identify any potential areas of difficulty and give some strategies for managing them. A few hours spent looking at anything that might be an issue could be a good insurance policy for the longevity of your marriage.

People do tend to get married without having communicated much about goals and expectations. They are then tripped up later on by unexpected issues.

Children, for example. If you haven't discussed having a family, it can come as a shock to find your partner doesn't share your long-held desire for a baby and family of your own.

The good news is that most issues can be worked out with some goodwill in the pre-marital stage. It will be harder five years down the track when the romantic gloss has worn a little.

Each partner also brings to the marriage a blueprint of what they think marriage is about, and it is generally the experience they grew up with. Which usually puts people into two camps – those who want a marriage just like their mum and dad's, and those who are desperate to avoid having a marriage like their parents have.

Pre-marriage counselling can help a couple work out their own joint vision of what marriage will be like for them.

Money is another angst-causing issue. If two people have been used to living independently, and used to their own budgets, some changes will have to be made.

Working out exactly how much togetherness you want when it comes to expenses and bills is vital to avoid trouble later on. Our original C-word, communication, is the big one here.

The other C-word you need to handle is conflict. It is inevitable that differences will exist. It's part of human nature and part of the attraction.

No two people are completely alike, so you will need to learn how to handle a difference of opinion when it arises.

The key? Try to avoid blaming your partner. Instead of wanting to prove that you are right and your spouse is wrong, change your perspective. Realise that there are two different opinions on the issue and ask about how you can talk about it in an attempt to sort things out.

Using different language can be helpful. Instead of starting every sentence with "you always do...", try using the words "I feel...".

It is far less likely to develop into a rip-roaring argument and you have taken a step down the path of resolving the issue. But don't try to do it when you feel like tearing your partner limb from limb – you will never sort out a difference when you're all fired up.

Remove yourself from the situation, calm down, and return to the issue when you feel in a quieter frame of mind.

You are taking a big step into an exciting phase of life – marriage. It won't be plain sailing, but you can become skilled relationship navigators and enjoy a long and fulfilling journey.

