

Marriage takes work

Reading typical “women’s magazines” could lead you to two contradictory conclusions about marriage.

The first is that marriage is wonderful, desirable state where everyone lives happily ever after. The second is that with infidelity and high divorce rates, staying married is for the minority.

If you decide to commit to getting married, you will want to be part of this “minority” and do everything to ensure you are.

Today we are time poor and have fewer community connections. Consequently, we may have high expectation that a future spouse will provide everything. That can lead to the expectation that a partner can meet all our social and emotional needs. That’s a very tall order for a marriage, and sets the bar very high.

The wedding is the outward social symbol of marriage, where friends and family witness the union. Here too, couples set a high bar and often wait until they can afford to buy a house, have secure jobs, finish overseas travel and earn their PhDs.

Often this delays marriage because of the pressure to achieve a benchmark. For some, this can make marriage seem unattainable.

Ask yourself if you really need six bridesmaids and a seven-course banquet at a posh reception centre. It is possible to have beautiful garden wedding with a simple but delicious wedding feast.

Many couples derive great benefit from doing programs such as Prepare at Relationship Australia or similar organisations.

Prepare is conducted over three private sessions with the couple and an experienced marriage-education counsellor, and helps couples discuss issues such as their expectations of marriage and parenting, communication and conflict-resolution skills.

Statements include things such as “We ask each other for help” and “I wish my partner was more willing to share their feelings with me” to “In the family I grew up in, there were rules for every occasion”.

Research has found that thinking about these questions in a Prepare program is a helpful guide to relationship strength and compatibility of styles. It helps to identify areas that might need attention.

Survival tips

- **Don’t fall into the trap of thinking your marital partner can fulfil all your emotional and social needs**
- **Don’t let peer pressure to have a big wedding stop you from getting married if the time is right. Opt for a simpler celebration.**
- **Consider doing the Prepare program to give yourselves a healthy start to marriage**