

Introduction And Use Of The Manual

Introduction

This manual is designed to be flexible. We hope that the material in this manual can be useful in a number of ways. Elders have a variety of styles, personal convictions, and preferences for handling proposals, working with engaged couples, and doing marital counseling. Hopefully, this material is presented in a way that accommodates each elder as much as possible.

An elder's use of this material will also vary based on factors such as the age of the individuals, spiritual maturity, family issues, local church issues, elder's comfort with counseling, and personal knowledge the elder may have of the individuals involved.

Individuals come to marriage with a variety of expectations and levels of understanding. This material is intended to teach God's design for marriage and sensitize them to the nature and demands of marriage. Its purpose is to encourage them to review their strengths, weaknesses, needs, values, and attitudes. In addition, it is designed to encourage the couple to examine themselves and their readiness for marriage. Hopefully, it will lead them to have open discussions about these areas and identify areas where they specifically need work.

Overview of the Premarital Counseling Session Outline

The Premarital Counseling Session Outline contains suggestions for counseling engaged couples. Each elder should use what he feels would be most helpful to him and the particular couple. In addition, when and how many counseling sessions are scheduled will also vary by elder and couple. The guidelines presented here are offered only as suggestions. Each elder can also modify the content of the Premarital Counseling Session Outline to match the needs of his local church. The Bible will continue to be our main counseling source.

The Premarital Counseling Session Outline can be used in any of the following ways:

- Elder's Use: Used by the elder for his own use.
- Session Outline: Used during the counseling sessions to provide structure and supplement the counseling.
- Homework Handout: Given to the couple to read on their own so that session time isn't taken up by sections the elder would prefer not to cover during the session.

The Premarital Counseling Session Outline is divided into three segments:

- Early engagement (see Tab 4C): The first session should be carried out prior to or immediately after the engagement is announced. The sister's elder is responsible for this. However, if the brother and sister are from distant congregations, each person may have to be counseled by his/her respective elder. In this case, this should be coordinated by the two elders involved.

Introduction And Use Of The Manual

- Mid-engagement (see Tab 5A): Counseling during the mid-engagement time is usually the responsibility of the sister's elder, as the wedding will very likely be in his church. If another elder is to perform the ceremony or if the wedding is to be in a church other than the sister's home church, additional elders often will be involved in the counseling. The elders involved should coordinate this and decide who will do this counseling.
- Late-engagement (see Tab 6): This information is often covered approximately two weeks prior to the wedding and is usually handled by the same elder who met with the couple at mid-engagement.

Note: The number of premarital counseling sessions that an elder chooses to have with a couple, per segment, will depend on the elder's preferences and the needs of the couple.

Modules & Supplemental Handouts:

The Premarital Counseling Session Outline provides suggestions for when to use the modules and supplemental handouts with couples (i.e., early, mid, or late engagement). However, this will vary widely based on the elder's preferences and the needs of each couple. An elder may choose to discuss the information in the handouts during a session with a couple, or he may choose to simply give the handouts to the couple to read on their own time. Elders may choose to give out only some of these handouts or to give the couple a complete **Premarital/Marital Handouts Binder**. Complete binders of these handouts are available from ACCFS.

Note: The majority of these handouts are equally effective with married couples as they are with engaged couples.

A Summary of the Sections in this Manual

Tab 2: Biblical Decision Making and Marriage Decision documents

These documents are designed to promote a biblical understanding of making faith-based decisions, including the decision to marry. They will assist single individuals with self-examination in light of the Word and in keeping a balanced perspective during the marriage decision making process. These documents are a compilation of interviews which have been done with over a dozen elders on how they counsel individuals considering marriage. Elders may choose to share this information in a variety of formats such as a Bible study with their Young Group or one-on-one with individuals who are considering marriage, etc. These documents are also available on our website at www.accounseling.org/marriagedecision.

Tab 3: At Proposal

These items are designed to assist elders counseling individuals who considering giving or receiving a proposal.

- A. Individual Interview Questions – At Proposal: This is a list of questions that an elder may potentially review with brothers and/or sisters at the time of sending and receiving a proposal. The questions are intended to help elders assess the spiritual wellbeing, maturity, emotional stability, and general readiness for an individual to consider a proposal. It is expected that factors such as how well the elder knows each individual, the elder's preferences, etc. will lead to modifications of this list.
- B. Factors that Could Potentially Lead to Marital Struggles: This document provides a list of issues that appear to be most frequently associated with severe marital problems, separations, and divorce among Apostolic Christian couples.

Introduction And Use Of The Manual

Tab 4: Early Engagement

- A. Premarital Counseling: What It Is and Why It Matters: This section provides a rationale for doing premarital counseling with engaged couples. This document is written so that it can be used in several ways depending on an elder's preference. First, it could be used by the elder for his information only. Second, the elder can review this information during a meeting with a couple to explain the importance of receiving good counsel prior to marriage. Finally, it can be given as a handout to a couple as homework for them to read on their own.
- B. Accountability Questions for Engaged Couples: This document is designed to help engaged couples to thoughtfully and intentionally maintain biblically-focused priorities and boundaries during their engagement. Elders may choose to review some or all of the questions with engaged couples or give it as a homework assignment.
- C. Premarital Counseling Session Outline – Early Engagement: In this segment of premarital counseling, elders help couples think through appropriate conduct during the engagement, maintain priorities during wedding planning, and lay the foundation for a Christ-centered marriage.

Tab 5: Mid Engagement

- A. Premarital Counseling Session Outline – Mid Engagement: In this segment of premarital counseling, elders help couples build important skills for communication, develop marital roles and respect, and learn to deal with differences.
- B. Individual Interview Questions – During Engagement: This is a list of potential questions an elder may choose to review separately with each individual in an engaged couple (takes approximately 20 minutes per person). The questions are intended to help elders monitor the growth of the engaged couple's relationship to ensure they are moving in a positive direction. It is expected that factors such as how well the elder knows each individual, the elder's preferences, etc. will lead to modifications of this list.

Tab 6: Late Engagement

- A. Premarital Counseling Session Outline – Late Engagement: In this segment of premarital counseling, elders counsel couples regarding seriousness of the marriage covenant, biblical principles of financial stewardship, and God's design for the couple's sexual relationship.
- B. Recognition and Assessment for Abuse within Marriage: This document highlights what abuse can look like within a marriage and also provides a sense of the appropriate timing, format, and questions to ask when assessing for abusive behavior in couples.

Tab 7: Post-Wedding Counseling and Follow-Up

- A. Post-Wedding Counseling and Follow-Up: This outline provides elders with suggestions and options for ways to follow up with newly married couples.
- B. Sample Follow-Up Letter: This form letter is a sample elders can use to offer encouragement to newly married couples and encourage them to request additional counsel, if needed.

Introduction And Use Of The Manual

- C. Questions to Consider when Reflecting on Your Marriage: This document provides married couples with a list of questions to assess the health of their marital relationship. Elders may choose to use it in a number of ways, including: (1) mailing it to couples along with a letter of encouragement, (2) reviewing it with a couple, or (3) having the couple review it with a mentor couple or minister.

Tab 8: A Guide for Marriage Counseling

This section provides a guide for elders to use when working with couples who are having marital difficulties. While not intended to be comprehensive, it provides elders with a framework for counseling and suggestions of Scriptures to use with couples. Note that the handouts in the Premarital-Marital Handouts Binder are often very helpful to use with couples in marital counseling.

Tab 9: Additional Resources for Premarital and Marital Counseling

This section is an annotated bibliography of additional resources that elders can use for their own reference or that can be recommended to couples based on the needs of the situation. Each of these materials has been carefully reviewed and screened. Many of these resources are currently being used by elders.

Obtaining Electronic Copies of all Premarital-Marital Counseling Materials

The contents of this entire manual and the premarital counseling handouts are available to each elder so that he can edit and modify the material as he sees fit. This entire manual is available in Microsoft Word and Adobe PDF formats in the Elder/Minister area of the ACCFS website. For those who prefer to have a set of masters in hard copy or on a CD, please contact ACCFS.

Obtaining Additional Complete Copies of the Elder Manual or Handouts Binder

ACCFS will gladly assemble and mail you additional copies of the **Elder Manual for Premarital-Marital Counseling** to share with deacons or lead ministers to whom you may delegate some counseling and/or the **Premarital-Marital Handouts Binder** to be given to couples. To request additional copies, please contact the ACCFS office at 309-263-5536 or office@accounseling.org.

Copyright 2008-2016 by Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services. Can be freely copied and redistributed. Not to be sold. For the latest version of this document, please visit www.accounseling.org/elders or scan here:

