

## Before Marriage: Saying “I Do” to Living Together

If you and your significant other are thinking of living together, you’re not alone. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, unmarried couples account for more than 4 million households in the United States, nearly 10 times the number in 1960. Other countries report a similar trend toward premarital cohabitation.

Most couples see living together as a transition toward matrimony. Theoretically, living together is a way to test long-range compatibility, to see each other as you really are and to work out relationship kinks before heading down the aisle. But research indicates that cohabitation is no better (and maybe even worse) at preparing a couple for marriage than traditional courtship.

### What the research shows

The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education compiled these not-so-encouraging statistics from recent studies on cohabitation:

Those who live together before marriage are almost twice as likely to divorce than those who do not live together.

76 percent of first-time cohabitants plan to wed their partner, but only 50 percent to 60 percent actually marry the person with whom they cohabit.

### The key to successful cohabitation *and* marriage

So, how do you know if living together is right for you? In general, the key factors contributing to successful and enduring marriages are the same factors necessary for successful cohabitation. For example, a marriage based on sexual compatibility alone is destined for failure as are live-in love relationships based on the same.

Review the list below. Do these characteristics of committed, enduring relationships describe yours? If not, you may want to spend more time getting to know your partner before sharing households *and* names:

- love relationship based on friendship and trust
- share similar values and priorities and hold similar views of marriage, fidelity, family, sharing of household responsibilities, money, how to spend free time, etc.
- mutual understanding of and respect for each other
- value the institution of marriage and desire to get married
- accept each other “as is”
- interest in pursuing relationships with each other’s family and friends
- physical attraction and sexual compatibility
- enjoy taking care of each other, making each other happy, supporting each other’s ambitions, surrendering some personal freedom to accommodate each other’s well-being

- do things together versus independently, from making financial decisions to deciding how to spend free time
- freely share most intimate thoughts, feelings and aspirations
- see each other as lifelong companions

### High-risk relationships

Committing to any long-term relationship is never without risk. But moving in together under some scenarios is likely to end in failure. High-risk indicators include:

- brief courtship
- relationship characterized by financial or emotional dependency
- relationship based solely on physical attraction
- history of live-in relationships, divorce
- uncertainty of long-term viability of relationship; excessive fear of divorce
- unequal commitment
- poor self-esteem
- relationships in which only one person is willing to make sacrifices for the other
- differences in age, education and religious/cultural background
- sexual incompatibility

### For those who want matrimony

Many couples who anticipate marriage but opt to live together first often become entrenched in the status quo. For this reason, if you decide that living together is right for your relationship, you may want to consider engagement and setting a wedding date before moving in. Doing so helps maintain the momentum toward tying the knot.

### Resources

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education  
5310 Belt Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20015-1961  
[www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com)

*Will Our Love Last? A Couple's Road Map* by Sam R. Hamburg, PhD. Scribner, 2000.

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Living Together* by Roseanne Rosen. Alpha, 2000.

Sources:

*The Art of Staying Together: A Couple's Guide to Intimacy and Respect* by Michal S. Broder, PhD. Hyperion, 1993.

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