

What is Marriage Education?

A Perspective for Members of the Bahá'í Faith

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to assist Bahá'ís in understanding what Marriage Education is, to explore its importance and potential role over time in the Bahá'í Community, and to encourage Bahá'í communities to be engaged in offering some form of Marriage Education as appropriate for their circumstances and in consideration of other priorities.
- 1.2 Marriage Education is a process of teaching important knowledge, skills, and attitudes about relationships and marriage. Marriage Education is not counseling or therapy, but instead it focuses on building understanding and competence. In other words, its purpose is to build capacity and strengths and equip people to be successful in their roles as relationship partners and then as marriage partners. It begins with preparation for relationships and marriage for individuals and couples of all ages and experience levels. The Universal House of Justice states: **“Careful preparation for marriage is an essential first step in the preservation of Bahá'í marriage.”** (Introduction to *Preserving Bahá'í Marriages* compilation, item 3). Marriage Education also provides marriage-strengthening tools for already-married couples. It can also provide skill building and assistance for deeply troubled couples considering separation or divorce, although this education is often best paired with help from a trained counselor. Marriage Education's focus is on taking timely actions to prevent future problems.
- 1.3 As individual marriages strengthen, people will learn by their example that marriage is not simply a game of chance. They will come to recognize that people can learn how to increase their mastery of marriage and become competent with the words, attitudes, and behaviors that increase success. The effect will be a strengthening of marriages and a revitalization of a culture that values marriage.
- 1.4 Incorporating Marriage Education into Bahá'í community life may seem like a daunting task, so included at the end of this document is a list of potential actions that individuals, communities, and institutions can take to support happy, lasting marriages. As Bahá'ís strengthen their own relationships or marriages, they will naturally engage in outreach to support the relationships and marriages of family members, friends, and the public. There is no single way to accomplish the transformation of marriages—every community will develop its human resources and implement what works best for it while managing its other priorities. Over time, as needed and timely, systematic educational programs will emerge and develop. Already in the secular community, there is an encouraging variety of Marriage Education programs and curricula that can assist in developing Baha'i-specific materials.
- 1.5 Bahá'í individuals, couples, and institutions have a pivotal role to play in the vital process of creating families with strong marriages at their foundation. Part of this role is incorporating both marriage preparation and marriage strengthening as integral to the life of the Bahá'í community (see pages 11 and 12). A possible outcome of this effort is that couples will not consider getting married without preparation, married couples will naturally engage in ongoing learning that helps them throughout marriage, and troubled couples will obtain assistance long before considering separation, a year of waiting, or divorce. This education, then, is likely to reduce the rate of divorce in the community and create happier marriages with skilled marriage partners.

Note: The words, “Marriage Education” are capitalized throughout this document to indicate the generality of faith-based and secular educational programs and methods that support marriage preparation and marriages. The term does not refer to, nor endorse, any specific program.

SECTION 2: THE LAW OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is no mere convenience, but rather it is a law of God. Obeying and supporting the laws of God is a fundamental responsibility for all who believe in Him. Bahá'u'lláh says:

And when He [God] desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: “Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118)

And further guidance states:

The Bahá'í Teachings do not only encourage marital life, considering it the natural and normal way of existence for every sane, healthy and socially-conscious and responsible person, but raise marriage to the status of a divine institution, its chief and sacred purpose being the perpetuation of the human race—which is the very flower of the entire creation—and its elevation to the true station destined for it by God.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations Vol. II*, p. 446)

Marriage is a foundational element for healthy and happy families. Thousands of years of religious laws and society's civil laws both support and protect it. Marriage Education affirms and recognizes the importance of having appropriate legal elements in place that allow marriage as an institution to continue and thrive.

SECTION 3: A CALL TO ACTION

- 3.1 The current problems in relationships and marriages globally, including the high rates of cohabitation, divorce, single-parenthood, forced marriages, domestic violence, and adultery, present us with the opportunity to transform the institution of marriage and to bring it to a new level of maturity, vitality, and stability. For the first time in history, there is in-depth, longitudinal research on what makes marriage work, which has resulted in exciting new marriage-strengthening programs, classes, and books. These science-based efforts, along with implementation of the spiritual guidance of the Bahá'í Writings about marriage, family, equality, and consultation can bring new hope and life to marriages.
- 3.2 Many Bahá'í communities and their friends and relatives are suffering from the breakup of marriages and families, and many Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies feel burdened with counseling cases. The number of troubled marriages and families, individuals who are cohabiting, and individuals scared to marry, are cause for concern.
- 3.3 Restoring love and harmony as the hallmark of marriages is a vital endeavor for the Bahá'í community and for the future of society, balanced, of course, with fulfilling the other vital tasks the community is engaged in achieving. Guidance indicates, **“...if the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the pre-eminent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? What possible**

influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace?” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222)

3.4 Throughout the world, there is a growing movement of people who are passionate about strengthening marriages, and many are becoming relationship coaches and marriage educators or coaches. They are taking initiative to make a difference, becoming passionate for Marriage Education, and incorporating it into their relationships and work, including within the Bahá'í community. They are truly committed to communicating new relationship and marriage information to individuals and couples and focusing on encouraging a culture that is pro-marriage and committed to family unity. Some of these people include:

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|------------------------|--|
| a. Married Couples | l. Clergy and religious institutions/congregations |
| b. Singles | m. Lay and family life educators |
| c. Parents | n. Facilitators |
| d. Families | o. Teachers |
| e. Citizens | p. Government leaders and policymakers |
| f. Community activists | q. Legal professionals |
| g. Scholars | r. Workshop facilitators |
| h. Researchers | s. Authors |
| i. Counselors | |
| j. Therapists | |
| k. Social workers | |

3.5 The Bahá'í community has vital contributions to make to the transformation of marriage and maturation of the institution of marriage. The following teachings, in particular, are vitally needed by everyone:

- The importance of loving, unified marriages and families as a foundation of a global, unified society
- The necessity of knowing a partner's character before marriage and encouraging the ongoing development of character qualities in the spouses after marriage
- The equality of women and men
- Using couple consultation as a communication and decision-making tool
- Accepting and encouraging racial and cultural diversity in marriages and families
- Practicing chastity, which includes trustworthiness and faithfulness, before and after marriage

Trained and committed Bahá'í marriage educators are in a position to share these teachings with everyone.

SECTION 4: WHY MARRIAGE?

4.1 The work of many marriage researchers is supporting the value of the institution of marriage, something that most religions have long taught is the best foundation for families and society. **“The Bahá'í teachings...centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution.”** (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 223). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also connects unity in the family with the unity of the entire world: **“Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations and**

you have all humanity. The family are the happenings in the life of the nation.... [and] nations are but an aggregate of families....” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222) [check against quotation that is in PUP, p. 157]

4.2 Some of the key research findings* from the social sciences about the social benefits of marriage are aligning with the Bahá’í belief in the importance of marriage. These are:

- Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers will have good relationships with their children
- Marriage supports financial stability for mothers and children and increases family wealth
- Children raised within stable, happy marriages do better in school and careers
- Family members enjoy better physical health, and men have longer life expectancies
- There is a lower rate of alcohol and substance abuse among married adults
- There is a lower rate of psychological distress and mental illness among children with low-conflict married parents
- Married adults are less likely to engage in criminal activity
- There is less domestic violence when women are married than in cohabiting or dating relationships
- There is a lower rate of child abuse when a child lives with biological, married parents

* Summarized from *Why Marriage Matters*; 2002, Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, and the Institute for American Values

SECTION 5: CURRENT CHALLENGES REQUIRE A NEW APPROACH

- 5.1 Couples with the intent to marry may approach Bahá’í Local Spiritual Assemblies to seek guidance on marriage preparation. They will also involve Assemblies in officiating their weddings, as the Assembly is responsible for ensuring couples uphold Bahá’í marriage laws. These couples often have limited knowledge and skills to sustain their marriages, and Spiritual Assemblies may have a set of study materials prepared, or they may be uncertain about what to offer the couple. Marriage educators can assist Assemblies in preparing materials or courses that provide the couples with needed spiritually-compatible guidance as the couples request it. Guidance provided on behalf of the Universal House of Justice states, **“The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá’í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them.”** (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 390-391)
- 5.2 Marriage preparation ideally should begin in homes and communities long before a couple begins courting and discussing the possibility of becoming engaged. It is valuable at any stage, however. Once the couple is serious about marrying, they will then approach their parents for consent to marry. Parents also need assistance with understanding and effectively participating in the process of knowing the character of the couple and with appropriately giving or denying consent.
- 5.3 Couples who are already married, and who are struggling with difficulties or complex issues, may also approach Spiritual Assemblies for support and guidance. This can often be a daunting and time-consuming challenge for Assemblies and, where available, their counseling committees. This is especially true when the couples are influenced by a culture that often encourages gender inequality and divorce and discourages commitment. The spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical consequences from separation and divorce can be very challenging for the individuals, families, and communities involved. Spiritual Assemblies may struggle to maintain the unity and functioning of

their own institutions and those they serve when the problems, separations, and divorces occur amongst their own members.

- 5.4 It is disturbingly common to hear people in society comment that divorce is almost inevitable, while at the same time, couples dream of being the exception. The failure rate for marriages in some countries is very high, and it often increases for re-marriages. With apparently poor odds of success, it is not surprising that many couples decide to live together, to delay marriage, and to “try it out” first instead. Since the Bahá’í Teachings prohibit cohabitation, such couples may become estranged from their Bahá’í community. [Note: As there are no research studies on marriage and divorce in the Bahá’í community, accurate and complete statistics are unavailable.]
- 5.5 Marriage Education is a hopeful new approach based on decades of marriage research and clinical practice. The research is clear: creating and sustaining marriages correlates strongly to how much a couple knows about how to make marriage work well, how good their skills are in sustaining their relationships, and their ability to practice what they learn. Couples can *learn* how to maintain a happy marriage.

SECTION 6: WHO ARE MARRIAGE EDUCATORS?

- 6.1 Marriage educators are people who are passionate about and committed to making a difference for individuals, couples, and marriages and creating a culture that supports the institution of marriage as a whole. Sometimes they are professional counselors, but this is not a requirement. Some Spiritual Assemblies are appointing counseling committees or Marriage Education committees, and the members of these committees are going through training to be relationship and marriage educators. Some in your community may be trained through Core Curriculum or another program that teaches what the Bahá’í Writings say about marriage. Training in virtues/character education can also be a vital part of supporting marriage preparation and marriages.
- 6.2 Research shows that often people with relationship experience can teach Marriage Education as well as—or better—than mental health professionals. You do not need a mental health degree or license to become a qualified Marriage and Family Education instructor. Diane Sollee, executive director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education (CMFCE) says, “Just as we don’t need heart surgeons to teach smoking cessation or diet and exercise classes, we don’t need a therapist to teach couples the best practices and perspectives for making their marriage or relationship successful.” Of course, this does not in any way discount the value that therapists offer to troubled couples, who respond to many issues that marriage educators may not be trained to handle.
- 6.3 Marriage educators may meet with couples for assessment and coaching sessions, or they may teach or facilitate workshops or courses with groups of individuals or couples. They may also facilitate groups of individuals or couples who meet to socialize and study. Facilitators often have attendees practice skills, such as communication, love, forgiveness, unity building, how to constructively solve problems, or how to effectively listen to one another. Sessions can be adapted for different age groups, cultural demographics, literacy level, and needs. Note: If the materials used are self-guided and comprehensive, someone with general facilitation skills may be able to easily lead a marriage education session without specialized training. Excellent candidates could be those with Ruhi tutor training, as time permits.
- 6.4 Marriage educators go through training so that they can offer classes based on research and/or religious texts. Many instructor-training courses are one to four days in length. Most Marriage Educators then engage in an ongoing process of learning from various books, courses, and

conferences. There are regularly updated options at the CMFCE website, www.smartmarriages.com, or you can search the Internet for other resources. CMFCE also offers an annual Smart Marriages and Happy Families Conference, which provides extensive opportunities for relationship and Marriage Education training.

SECTION 7: MARRIAGE EDUCATION STRATEGIES

- 7.1 Marriage Education, again, is the process of assisting people to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support them in creating happy and effective marriages. Generally, it is not about responding to the pathology of relationships in trouble; rather it is about building marital health and wellbeing. However, some marriage educators may have or may add professional training that gives them the ability to offer specialized assistance to couples who are facing such issues as alcohol/drug dependency, infidelity, extreme anger, domestic violence, and more. Bahá'í institutions have an ongoing and vital role in assessing the needs of the community and then taking appropriate actions to encourage strong marriages.
- 7.2 Commitment to this vital matter may involve providing high-quality marriage preparation materials and programs that assist couples to know each other's character and families. These help to ensure couples know how to work in partnership to create happy and spiritually-based marriages. An Assembly's commitment may also include having ongoing strengthening sessions for all marriages that support their sustainability, not just offering referrals to professional remedial counseling and indicating recommended actions for marriages that are in trouble, although this is also needed.
- 7.3 Marriage Education utilizes a number of different methods, although the primary ones are workshops, classes, or group study. The following paragraphs detail some of the options.
- 7.4 Spiritual Assemblies and marriage educators can arrange effective **workshops or classes** for people in their communities so that they can participate in preparing for marriage or engage in marriage strengthening. These options provide knowledge and skill building for successful marriages. They can also provide valuable encouragement and training opportunities to support individual initiative, as people who attend sessions can often develop an interest in training to be marriage educators as well.
- 7.5 Spiritual Assemblies might find it valuable to offer couples the opportunity to use a **relationship inventory or assessment tool**. These tools provide a structured report for discussion and coaching the couple through issues. Assessments can also point the couple to specific areas where they can benefit from knowledge-building or skill-training opportunities. Assessments can be particularly helpful to a couple before they request consent to marry in ensuring that they are ready, or for a married couple who is experiencing challenges.
- 7.6 It may be possible for some Spiritual Assemblies to set up a **couples' mentoring program**, where married couples confidentially work with engaged or newlywed couples for a few months, offering their marital experience and guiding them through a thorough discussion of marriage and helping them practice skills together. Mentor training programs are available.
- 7.7 Unmarried individuals and couples can study materials and books about relationships and marriage as an informal group or along with a facilitator. Married couples could also gather for ongoing **study and strengthening sessions**. These can often be both social and supportive experiences, especially as they are educational and not designed to be group therapy sessions.

- 7.8 Many marriage educators have developed and are continuing to develop Marriage Education **books and materials**. While some are strictly secular and some are religiously-based, many combine both scientific research on marriage and spiritual teachings (Bahá'í or other faiths). Marriage educators and Spiritual Assemblies can explore and determine what works best for their situations. If there are specific interests or needs, an existing Marriage Education program may be willing to adapt or develop its materials for a community or the population it serves.
- 7.9 There are many sources of training or information. As previously mentioned, the website www.smartmarriages.com lists a wide array of marriage education resources.
- 7.10 An important point to remember as you explore and engage in Marriage Education is the guidance from the Universal House of Justice, which says, **“Learning in action is becoming the outstanding feature of the emerging mode of operation”** (January 17, 2003). Marriage Education is a fairly new endeavor for the Bahá'í community, and it will take many efforts and initiatives, as well as careful evaluation of each, to determine what works best for each circumstance and population. All efforts must also keep in mind the time commitments and priorities that the Universal House of Justice sets for the global community.

SECTION 8: WHAT DO COUPLES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MARRIAGE?

Marriage educators may provide some or all of the following vital knowledge and skills that support successful marriages:

- Communicating effectively
- Developing and utilizing consultation for decision-making
- Understanding expectations
- Resolving differences harmoniously
- Knowing one another's character
- Building a foundation of friendship
- Committing to marriage
- Honoring the consent process
- Expressing love effectively
- Establishing spiritual practices
- Creating marriage and family unity
- Being effective parents/stepparents
- Becoming equal partners, with both the man and the woman involved in and responsible for the quality of the relationship or marriage; no partner/child abuse or violence
- Meeting emotional needs
- Maintaining faithfulness
- Discussing sex and intimacy and establishing a healthy, unified intimate life in marriage
- Managing money issues
- Setting up and maintaining a household
- Managing time and service commitments
- Handling challenges and difficulties
- Practicing apology, amends, and forgiveness
- Having a positive attitude and using encouragement
- Including social and friendship time together and with others
- And many more...

SECTION 9: HELP AT ANY RELATIONSHIP STAGE

- 9.1 Although each relationship and marriage has unique challenges, researchers identify some transition points when increasing relationship and marriage knowledge and skills is particularly helpful. Each major change couples experience brings a different set of stresses that can disrupt the balance in a couple and cause them to question their relationship. Couples can get help from relationship coaching

and Marriage Education programs at any stage, regardless of how long the relationship has existed or its circumstances. The transition points that may need extra attention include:

- Pre-Marriage (Self-Preparation; Friendship; Dating; Courting; Getting to Know Character; Consent; Engagement)
- Newly Married
- Becoming Parents/Stepparents
- Parenting Young Children
- Parenting Adolescents
- Empty-Nesting/Returning Children
- Retiring/Elderly
- Serious illness, disability, or death
- Any time there is a strong test or difficulty

- 9.2 The amount of love a couple feels toward one another can ebb and flow, affected by attention, interactions, and circumstances. Guidance that assists couples to increase the amount of appropriate loving actions they do within the home toward one another can stabilize the marriage when couples feel less connected. Knowledge of what to expect in marriage can support couples through the times when they are struggling and help them to sustain and strengthen their bond in the process. Couples may also need specific relationship-maintenance skills at each stage, especially the transition to parenthood. New parents need encouragement and support to nurture their marriage, while they also nurture their children.
- 9.3 Marriage Education can also help with some specific challenges in relationships. These include assisting cohabiting couples to separate or marry, estranged couples to rekindle love and unity, and stepfamilies/blended families to thrive.

SECTION 10: THE POSSIBILITY OF HAPPY, LASTING MARRIAGES

- 10.1 Marriage Education gives couples the hope of being happy in marriage, without the regular destructive conflict or disappointment common in many relationships today. Couples can learn important skills that allow them to communicate effectively as they raise and resolve most issues peacefully and constructively through prayer and consultation. The same major issues crop up in most relationships, regardless of religious convictions: children, money, in-laws, sex, housework, and time management. With time and training, couples can learn effective means to respond to all of them. Marriage Education in the Bahá'í community can include a wide array of guidance on these topics. Couples can also learn to accept and move forward past the handful of unsolvable issues that exist in almost every relationship, so they are not constantly disrupting their marriages through resisting or arguing about what is unlikely to change.
- 10.2 Many couples may also need assistance with developing spiritual habits that can sustain marriages, such as marital and family prayer, studying the Bahá'í Writings together, participating in community activities, and serving others in a balanced and moderate way.
- 10.3 Happy marriages and unified, intact families are a key part of the foundation for the success of Bahá'í community efforts of all kinds. When a couple is happy, they are more likely to render effective service on institutions, as study circle tutors, in organizing children's classes, in hosting devotional meetings,

in working with junior youth and youth, and all other acts of loving service. Most important, they are better able to fulfill their indispensable role as effective parents for the next generation.

- 10.4 Often couples approach Spiritual Assemblies long after problems have begun, and the issues are, therefore, harder to address and resolve. Marriage preparation skills training starts couples off in married life with strong advantages, particularly knowing how to communicate effectively with one another and prevent destructive conflict. This training provides couples with skills to prevent marriage problems. Ongoing marriage strengthening education will then help keep couples' marriages going more smoothly or help them to know when to ask for assistance promptly and proactively.
- 10.5 Even when a couple's marriage is in trouble, most situations can be improved or even transformed with effective Marriage Education. This is, of course, if at least one spouse and preferably both are willing to acquire knowledge and practice new skills. Improvement can happen even if the couple has been married a long time or is in significant difficulties. Few situations are hopeless. Separation and divorce do not have to be almost automatic options, an occurrence that is happening both within and outside the Bahá'í community. Marriages can become happy, fulfilling, and lasting, even after challenging times. Bahá'í institutions have a role in ensuring this outcome.
- 10.6 An emerging area of Marriage Education involves effective assistance for couples who are separated and considering divorce. These materials, particularly in the hands of a skilled facilitator, such as a Spiritual Assembly, can help couples to understand and calm emotions, set up effective structures for family maintenance and couple interactions, and offer options to rebuild the marital relationship. These materials may assist Spiritual Assemblies who are guiding couple throughout years of waiting.
- 10.7 A climate of unified support strengthens marriages. This includes parents, in-laws, and friends encouraging and supporting couples; Spiritual Assemblies being conscious of the responsibilities they place on individuals and couples that could interfere with marriage and family time; and communities that pray for their marriages and families. Maintaining marriages takes the attention, love, and effort of everyone.

SUMMARY

To be sustainable, marriages require knowledge, effective skills, a spiritual foundation, and family and community support. Strong and happy marriages and families contribute to the establishment and transformation of the global society. Creating and maintaining marriages and families in the Bahá'í community includes empowering and developing new methods of relationship and Marriage Education and then sharing them with other couples and families throughout the world.

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**“Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity....**

**“The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God.”** (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, sec. 86, p. 118)

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END NOTE

Many people are involved in strengthening and promoting marriage. One resource for this is The Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education (CMFCE) and their publication, “Strengthening Marriages in Your Community: 101 Ideas to Get You Started.” Ordering information and resources are at www.smartmarriages.com.

“What is Marriage Education?” is written by Susanne M. Alexander, a Bahá’í, a relationship, marriage, and character educator, who is certified in PREPARE/ENRICH relationship assessments, trained as a PREP facilitator (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) and in FranklinCovey’s “The 8 Habits of a Successful Marriage” program. She is President of Marriage Transformation LLC. She and her husband, Craig A. Farnsworth, publish books and facilitate workshops based on Bahá’í principles. Susanne is co-author of *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, *Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship*, *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage*, and other publications.

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www.marriagetransformation.com/learning_marriageeducation.htm

APPENDIX:

Supporting Relationships and Marriages—Some Possible Actions for Individuals, Couples, Communities, and Bahá'í Institutions

Practical Ways for Individuals and Couples to Assist Relationships and Marriages

Note: Any relationship/marriage education effort can include people of all faiths: as organizers, facilitators, and participants. When doing an activity, look for ways to connect it to the work of the Five Year Plan/Core Activities.

1. Pray for your own current or future marriage. Pray for the relationships and marriages of others.
2. Participate in individual and couple pre-marriage education and marriage strengthening study and education.
3. Identify the knowledge and skills you can gain from core activities that will apply in your current or future relationship/marriage, set goals to gain them, and participate.
4. Learn about the Bahá'í laws related to marriage and the spiritual and administrative outcome of disobeying them.
5. Work cooperatively with your local Spiritual Assembly to obtain marriage education materials and to request an Assembly officiate your wedding; ask their advice as needed.
6. Maintain daily healthy practices together that assist the marriage to stay strong and happy; such as, praying, consulting and prioritizing, reading about character qualities, and having fun.
7. Encourage married couples you know to seek help promptly when they are experiencing difficulties.
8. Mentor engaged and newlywed couples.
9. Encourage parents to participate in parenting skills training that helps them to model an excellent marriage for their children.
10. Respect and fully participate in the parental consent process for marriage.
11. Participate in marriage preparation or marriage strengthening workshops.
12. Attend seasonal Bahá'í schools and learning events that include relationship and marriage content, or regard the event as relationship or marriage nurturing time together.
13. Incorporate character (virtues) education in all core activities for all ages; children's classes can contain a character component, devotional meetings can focus on character qualities as themes, junior youth groups can incorporate character education, and study circles include character qualities naturally in their content.
14. Offer childcare to a couple so that they can spend marriage-strengthening time together.
15. Set up or participate in study sessions using the Universal House of Justice compilations, "A Chaste and Holy Life" and "Preserving Bahá'í Marriages."
16. Have the readings and prayers during the spiritual portion of a 19-Day Feast relate to marriage.
17. Hold a devotional meeting about marriage.
18. Hold a fireside about marriage.
19. Commemorate your own wedding anniversary and the wedding anniversaries of friends and relatives.
20. Facilitate sessions for junior youth that assist them to prepare for relationships and marriage.
21. Facilitate sessions for youth and young adults on the topics of relationships and marriage.
22. Prepare and present research papers on marriage at Association of Bahá'í Studies conferences.
23. Develop the arts in support of marriage (Examples: music, stories, poetry, painting, drama...).
24. Request local libraries and bookstores to carry books on marriage preparation and marriage.

Practical Ways for Communities and Institutions to Assist Relationships and Marriages

Note: Any relationship/marriage education effort can include people of all faiths: as organizers, facilitators, and participants. When doing an activity, look for ways to connect it to the work of the Five Year Plan/Core Activities. Remember the guidance from the Universal House of Justice not to be distracted from the work of the Plan. This means that some of the suggestions below may not be timely for many communities. Whatever marriage education initiatives a community takes or does not engage in at this time, it will be wise for Assemblies to encourage couples and families to include the health of their relationship and families as a priority while being involved in fulfilling the goals of the plans of the Universal House of Justice.

1. Pray for people's marriages and those who want to be married.
2. Encourage couples to pray for their own current or future marriages.
3. Participate in home visits to build relationships with community members.
4. Include pre-marriage education and marriage strengthening in the community's goals.
5. Recruit volunteers to seek marriage educator training; Spiritual Assemblies may choose to subsidize training.
6. Create a relationship/marriage education team for educating the community on establishing and maintaining healthy relationships/marriages. It works best when this function is separate from a counseling committee that works with troubled couples seeking to separate or divorce. However, the Spiritual Assembly may choose to ask the education committee to focus on general areas of concern it sees happening in relationships and marriages.
7. Educate the community about the laws related to marriage and the spiritual and administrative outcome of disobeying the laws.
8. Provide couples with marriage education materials when they request an Assembly officiate their wedding and offer additional guidance as needed or when requested.
9. Encourage couples to seek help promptly when they are experiencing difficulties.
10. Identify as referral options those individuals who offer effective reconciliation-focused marriage counseling to troubled individuals and couples; wherever possible, locate counselors who include an education component in their practices. [www.marriagefriendlytherapists.com is a resource]
11. Set up a mentoring program for happily married couples to mentor engaged and newlywed couples.
12. Encourage parents to participate in parenting skills training that helps them to model an excellent marriage for their children; offer such training to the community.
13. Educate and assist parents in effectively handling the parental consent process.
14. Sponsor, organize, or participate in ongoing study sessions in the community about relationships and marriage.
15. Sponsor and organize marriage preparation workshops regularly or assist people to participate in them in other locations.
16. Sponsor or organize marriage-strengthening workshops regularly or assist people to participate in them in other locations.
17. Sponsor or organize facilitated marriage retreats of a variety of lengths for married couples.
18. Offer character (virtues) training for all ages; incorporate character (virtues) education in all core activities for all ages; children's classes can contain a character component, devotional meetings can focus on character qualities as themes, junior youth groups can incorporate character education, and study circles include character qualities naturally in their content.
19. Sponsor or organize couples' support and education groups.
20. Encourage couples to serve the community together as a couple.

21. Help couples in maintaining a balance between service and time together to develop their relationship or to sustain their marriage. Help them to understand that establishing a solid relationship or maintaining their marriage is one way they serve God, Bahá'u'lláh, and the community.
22. Assist those married to people who are not Bahá'ís to limit their service as appropriate in order to spend time with their families. Build relationships with their spouses as much as possible.
23. Offer childcare to a couple so that they can spend marriage-strengthening time together.
24. Set up study sessions using the Universal House of Justice compilations, “A Chaste and Holy Life” and “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages.”
25. Have the readings and prayers during the spiritual portion of a 19-Day Feast relate to marriage.
26. Consult at the 19-Day Feast and at unit conventions about actions to take to support marriage preparation and marriages.
27. Have a book report/review at the 19-Day Feast social portion about a marriage-related book that is approved for distribution at Bahá'í activities.
28. Hold a devotional meeting about marriage.
29. Hold an annual marriage celebration party.
30. Include relationship and marriage education in community newsletters or Bahá'í publications for children, youth, and adults.
31. Track and recognize the wedding anniversaries of community members.
32. Determine the community statistics for marriage and divorce, and set goals and create action plans to improve marriage retention. Research and track the improvement process.
33. Be sensitive and wise about assigning unrelated people to work together on community tasks or committees who are in troubled marriages so that the service does not result in an inappropriate relationship or infidelity.
34. Hold relationship workshops on campuses sponsored by Bahá'í Campus Clubs.
35. Hold sessions at regional and permanent Bahá'í schools on the topic of relationships and marriage.
36. Hold sessions for junior youth that assist them to prepare for relationships and marriage.
37. Hold sessions at youth and young adult conferences on the topics of relationships and marriage.
38. Set up Year of Service opportunities that support marriage preparation and marriage education.
39. Encourage skilled and knowledgeable community members to prepare and present research papers on marriage at Association of Bahá'í Studies conferences.
40. Encourage talented and knowledgeable community members to develop the arts in support of marriage (Examples: music, stories, poetry, painting, drama...).
41. Set up an interfaith marriage education initiative.
42. Request local libraries and bookstores to carry books on marriage preparation and marriage.
43. Recommend books on relationships and marriage for Book Club discussions at bookstores or in homes.
44. Participate in Marriage Week USA, which occurs annually in the United States from February 7-14, or begin something similar in your community or country.

Note: A general marriage education resource is www.smartmarriages.com.