MARRIAGE & families
EDITOR'S NOTES

MARRIAGE—YES. COHABITING—NO. AND HOW TO MAKE MARRIAGE WORK.

As Michael Medved explained, if Martians came to earth and watched a typical day of television, they’d think families in our society were mostly dysfunctional, that everyone slept around, and that almost no one bothered to get married. He went on to say that children are like little Martians—learning what’s acceptable in society from what they see on television.

So what is it about cohabiting; that is, a couple living together as if they were married without bothering with a ring, license—or ceremony? When my friends and I were students, we heard about an occasional inappropriate sleep-over. I suppose there have always been couples who cohabited. But I didn’t know any cohabiting couples back then. I can’t remember any cultural messages that made cohabiting seem like an acceptable, everyday thing. It wasn’t. And even though it is common today, it still isn’t acceptable. I think you’ll be interested in Professor Jeffry Larson’s article in this issue about the influence of cohabitation on marriage. Compare the myths to the reality measured by research that he shares with us, along with Professor Tom Holman’s comments about cohabiting, with the emphasis on "Don’t do it."

Everyone knows that getting married doesn’t guarantee success. Marriage can be tough. So whether you are looking forward to getting married, have just entered into a marriage covenant, or have been around the block with your spouse for a few years or several decades, I think you’ll find Dr. James Harper’s article, "The Marriage Dance," filled with helpful ideas. By the way, even if you are like me and don’t like dancing, I think you’ll like Jim’s metaphor of marriage and dancing. You’ll pick up some clues about how to show that you love each other and how to make your own marriage better—as well as ways to help others to make their marriages stronger. In other words, I’d suggest reading this issue from cover to cover, without missing a paragraph.

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THE MARRIAGE DANCE
James M. Harper

THE VERDICT ON COHABITATION VS. MARRIAGE
Jeffry H. Larson

REVERSING THE TREND
Thomas B. Holman

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THE MARRIAGE DANCE

by James M. Harper

Do you want to dance? If we think of patterns in a marriage as a dance, it might help us change a few dance steps—which, in turn, will improve the marriage.

What happens when we dance? Dance partners must follow patterns and attend to each other. The dancers give and receive feedback; they engage in verbal and nonverbal behavior. Physiological linkages between dancers probably contribute to rhythm and synchrony; that is, moving together as the dance progresses. You need to monitor yourself and your dance partner in order to have good rhythm and good synchrony.

Some of the patterns in marriage involve time cycles, or rhythms, and synchrony as husband and wife live together in a complementary way. On weekends, for example, a couple’s behavior is often different than it is during the week. Conflict patterns often recur—a couple may have a major argument just before payday every month. Kindness patterns recur, too. If a wife is sick, the husband may go to the store for clear liquids or put socks on her cold feet. If a husband is tired, a wife may do all the chores that day or give him a back rub.

Like dancers, husbands and wives monitor distance between each other. We become comfortable with the amount of emotional and physical distance we learned as children. In our adult relationships, we continue to regulate distance according to our comfort.

Married couples, like dancers, have reciprocity. Reciprocity means you exchange similar behaviors. In a dance, reciprocity can be a problem if both partners put their feet forward at the same time. They step on each other’s toes. Sometimes a couple will trade anger for anger or criticism for criticism. Reciprocity is not necessarily a good pattern when it exchanges bad for bad, but when it exchanges good for good, like eye-gazing or comforting, it is a good part of a family pattern.

Interactional synchrony is usually a better pattern than reciprocity in marriage. "Interactional synchrony" occurs when husband and wife learn each other’s rhythms and modify their behavior to fit those rhythms.

A husband who knows his wife needs more sleep may prepare breakfast and get himself on his way in the morning. A wife who knows her husband is trying to get more exercise may invite him to go for a walk or a bike ride each evening. Long-time dance partners know that they might lose their rhythm if the man twirls the woman more than three times, or that the man likes to pause where a step would ordinarily be to emphasize the partners’ closeness or eye-gaze a little.

Eye-gazing between couples is an important pattern. "Eye-gazing" is the mutual eye contact that enhances the bond between two people. Emotions, physiology, and basic passions strengthen our connections through shared eye-gazing. Think of the first time that you met somebody that you liked and stared into his or her eyes. Think of the time you purposefully avoided your dance partner’s eyes during a slow dance, or when you stared at your dance partner’s eyes during "your song." Think of when you walked down the sidewalk and met an
Families operate on implicit "family process rules."

Attractive person of the opposite sex. Within ten feet there is sort of a body search that starts from the bottom and goes up and down until your eyes meet and you immediately glance away. What would happen if your eyes met and you eye-gazed for a while?

What are some other patterns in the marriage dance? I've been interested for years "family process rules." These rules are understood but not usually talked about. They are not things like who does which chores or that one marriage partner calls the other to say he or she will be late. Process rules develop over time because of redundancy and social interaction. The particular type of interaction becomes a pattern. For example, a process rule can come from a couple's dating pattern. When he comes to pick her up, he's 15 minutes late on the first date. She doesn't say much. Second date, he's 15 minutes late, she doesn't say much. He continues the pattern several times. Finally about the seventh time she's fairly upset, and so she confronts him when he arrives and says you've been late now seven times; what's going on? He becomes angry. Why? He has indeed been late seven times, but the redundancy in the interaction had become an unspoken rule. It appeared that it was okay with her if he was late. Suddenly she was changing the rules.

If we return to the dance, a regular partner might know that the other partner refuses to "dance" the clutch-and-sway two-step that ends up in a close hug. Perhaps the partners have always gone for punch and cookies during those songs. If one partner leads the other to the dance floor and she puts both arms around his neck or he takes her right arm and puts it around his neck, the rules have apparently changed. The partners need to talk about it.

Families operate on such implicit rules. A few years ago, now-retired marriage and family therapist Margaret Hoopes and I were interested in negative family rules. We brainstormed some of the rules we thought would be true for alcoholic family systems. We developed fifteen. Here are some examples of destructive rules:

- Don't feel or talk about feelings.
- Rather than be who you are, act good, right, strong, or perfect.
- Don't have fun, be silly, or enjoy life.
- Don't trust yourself, your feelings, or your conclusions.

Marriage and family therapist Jeffry Larson has also done several studies about implicit family rules. He found that adults from alcoholic families reported using the negative rules more than adults from non-alcoholic families.

Young adults from families with negative rules reported more problems with cohesion, emotional expressiveness, and overall family functioning. We also developed a scale that includes positive rules, such as:

- Encourage others to share their feelings.
- Play and have fun together.
- Be gentle.
- Don't blame others unfairly.

Why are unspoken family rules important? If a family can change the rules, or steps of the dance, they can sometimes change the whole dance festival—the family, perhaps for generations.

Are the patterns in marriage fairly stable over time? According to clinical psychologist John Gottman, you can predict divorce from the first three minutes of social interaction by tapping and cod-
Self-soothing and self-regulation are two fulfilling marital dance steps. You can teach people that when they're aware that they're emotionally aroused (e.g., angry, upset, frightened), they can say things like "relax, she still loves me. It's not always like this. We really do love each other." Some of those techniques help. If you teach couples to deep-breathe, to use relaxation techniques, they can soothe their own emotions in about 20 minutes. If a couple returns to an interaction too soon, they're often not able to continue because they haven't self-regulated, or soothed the emotions that are causing problems. The opposite of self-soothing is emotional or physiological escalation, which makes things worse.

Couples who have that problem may work themselves up to a dangerous point, as though they were competing to dance faster, to the point of trying to outlast the other, watch the other be injured or exhausted first, or "win." If only one partner to the marriage dance "wins," then no one really wins.

What are some other good dance steps? A soft start. Wives, don't go to your husbands and say, "You never take out the garbage; I've about had it with you." That's not a soft start. Soft starts are important. Don't begin the dance by throwing your partner in the air and trying to catch her or jumping off a table and expecting him to catch you. Take time to synchronize yourselves to the music and to each other. Discern where you and your spouse are, emotionally and physiologically, before you begin to dance.

Nurturing is important. Gottman recently advised couples to nurture fondness for their partners. Think of the good times together; think of the reasons you married each other. Don't let fondness for your partner or children become rare. Avoid demanding, dwelling on bad times, criticizing, or showing resentment. Observational research shows that when women make demands on men, the men usually withdraw. That's because women tend to make more demands about marital relationship issues. Another piece of research shows that if men get mad and make demands, women also withdraw. Men just don't make demands on relationships as much. Demand followed by withdrawal is not a good dance step. It's like one dance partner pulling the other too close and the other partner pushing away. The couple are sending mixed, opposing signals. There are more graceful and less exhausting ways to dance.

A third, good step in marriage dancing is flexibility rather than rigidity. Let me give you an example. Typical interaction between husband and wife is she says, "I love you," and what does he say back? "I love you, too." I've started changing that. My wife will tell you that I have all kinds of things that I say back. My favorite of late is she says, "I love you" and I say, "I love you more."
sometimes, "Oh, no you don't." Or sometimes I say, "I'm really glad that you love me." Or "Thank you." But I vary my behavior simply because I believe flexibility is important. In my research with Gwenaelle Couillard we studied rigid thought that affected marriage. We found that couples who are rigid and dogmatic in thought only saw the world in one way. They did not have as good a marital quality. The dance wasn't as good as it was for couples who were more flexible. I started changing my behavior as a result of my research. I realized there were multiple views of any situation, that my view of the good times together; think of the reasons you married each other.

chronous breathing is an interesting phenomenon; it simply means there's mutual feedback in breathing rhythm. I watch my wife's breathing rate, and I try to synchronize my breathing with hers. When she inhales, I inhale; when she exhales, I exhale. For those of you who are married, go home and try it. If you're single, don't do it. It's a very intimate experience. You have to regulate yourself; you have to watch your partner. There's mutual feedback; it's sequential; it's simultaneous; it's nonverbal behavior; you're usually not talking when you do it; it provides physiological linkage between husband and wife. I recommend more synchronous breathing for married couples.

Let your spouse influence you. Everyone who's been dancing knows that it's fun to try new steps and essential to signal each other's partner that he or she is about to collide with another couple. Gottman is finding in his research that, particularly when husbands allow their wives to influence them, it's a great marriage dance step. Particularly if there's a repair attempt—if he doesn't try to put it on me." I learned long ago that it was a great strategy just to defer to my wife when she was saying something about me. Say, "You're right, I really am a klutz; I probably get it from my great-great-grandfather." If you can't soothe your rising emotions, you can't be nondefensive. If you can become aware of your physiology and emotions, you can calm yourself. Maybe you have to go away, breathe deeply, do relaxation exercises, tell yourself "She really doesn't hate me, she's trying to give

Gottman's research indicates, because the marriage dance is so stable, that if you don't learn different kinds of conflict resolution, you're going to try to resolve everything in the same way. One bad predictor for marriage is if you have private conflict that never gets resolved. Learn and use conflict resolution processes. It's a myth that happily married couples don't fight. They often have intense conflicts, but they get the issue resolved. It doesn't go on and on. You wouldn't want to keep dancing if your partner reminded you every time you missed a step. Practice, take lessons, discuss why it's important, but don't continue to exchange the same old criticisms. Resolve the problems so you can get back to the joy of dancing together.

Learn nondefensiveness skills. When you're defensive, you come up with an excuse for your behavior. Or you counterattack. The message to your partner is always, "I'm not to blame for this, you are; don't try to put it on me." I learned long ago that it was a great strategy just to defer to my wife when she was saying something about me. Say, "You're right, I really am a klutz; I probably get it from my great-great-grandfather." If you can't soothe your rising emotions, you can't be nondefensive. If you can become aware of your physiology and emotions, you can calm yourself. Maybe you have to go away, breathe deeply, do relaxation exercises, tell yourself "She really doesn't hate me, she's trying to give

wasn't necessarily the correct one, and that I could entertain multiple views. As a marriage therapist I have seen multiple views of what the damage was all about. The pattern looked similar, but each person had a different explanation. When husbands and wives had rigid explanations, they were usually in a highly distressed marriage.

There are many good dance steps: be more affectionate, eye-gaze more, and synchronize breathing. Syn-
Particularly when he or she is making an attempt to repair the relationship, allow your spouse to have influence over you.

me feedback, she's trying to work on this." Then you can return and work it through. It could be a new marital dance step and you could become a better dancer.

Last, learn the lost art of listening. Responsive listening is important. Rather than stonewalling, where somebody just stops listening, turns his or her head, and looks the other way, listen. Stonewalling causes problems on top of problems. Responsive listening, where you listen (rather than planning your defense) and respond with expressions of your feelings, is a better step in the marriage dance.

The marriage dance can be fast or slow, routine or exciting, a dance of mourning or a dance of happiness—or all those things at different times. Every couple goes through cycles. The couples that learn to soothe themselves and each other, to be nondefensive, and to be flexible will find great rewards. Most important, the husband and wife must learn to bring healthy patterns to their marriage and family life, leaving unhealthy patterns behind. The marriage dance is not a matter of luck or fate; we can learn through counseling and education to take the steps we must to engage our spouses in a dance of joy.

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COHABITATION, OR LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE, IS A DRAMATIC, SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE WAY MANY ADULTS IN OUR COUNTRY EVOLVE FROM BEING SINGLE TO BEING MARRIED. The majority of all U.S. marriages today involve cohabitation before the wedding. Between 1974 and 1994, the percentage of marriages preceded by cohabitation increased from 10 percent to 56 percent. In addition, recent surveys of single young adults in five large cities...
Cohabitation actually increases a couple’s chances of being divorced someday.

Show that the majority of both men and women in the studied groups favor cohabitation before marriage. In one national sample, almost 60 percent of high school seniors in the mid-1990s agreed with the statement, "It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along."

Despite these commonly held beliefs, the idea that cohabitation will somehow improve the quality of a subsequent marriage is wrong. Research over the last thirty years shows that cohabitation does not lead to increased satisfaction or stability in marriage. Compared to marriage, cohabitation creates disadvantages for individuals, couples, and children.

Before describing these disadvantages, let’s first examine why couples choose to cohabit—either as a prelude to marriage or as an expected "permanent" lifestyle.

**Why Would Anyone Consider Cohabiting?**

Although some couples say they cohabit for convenience (e.g., only one apartment to clean) or to lower their cost of living (one apartment is cheaper than two), most adults say they cohabit for one or more of the following reasons: (1) for emotional and sexual intimacy without the obligations of marriage; (2) to test their compatibility; (3) to prepare for marriage by practicing living with someone 24/7; and (4) to better know each other's habits, character, and fidelity. Some people perceive cohabitation as a way to have a more intimate relationship without the risks of divorce or being trapped in an unhappy marriage. But cohabitation does not lead to marriage in the majority of cases; among cohabiters who do marry, their chances of divorce are actually increased. No one has ever found that cohabitation makes a positive contribution to later marital stability.

**Four Reasons Why Cohabitation Increases the Chance of Divorce**

There are several reasons why cohabiting increases a couple’s chances of divorce: First, people willing to live together are more unconventional than others and tend to be less committed to marriage as an institution. These two factors make it easier for them to leave a marriage later if it becomes unsatisfying. Marriage, after all, is a unique relationship that assumes a vow of permanence. Most cohabiters fear, or are not ready for, such a permanent relationship. For them, according to The Case for Marriage, an important new book by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, cohabitation's biggest attraction is the relatively easy exit with few responsibilities. Unfortunately, for many young adults, their parents' failed marriages may contribute to the expectation that marriages are fragile and divorce is common.

Those who are afraid of commitment and permanence, or who fear that these qualities can no longer be found in marriage, may settle for cohabitation. They are likely to discover they have settled for much less. Cohabiting relationships are relatively short-lived—after five years, only about 10 percent of couples who cohabit and do not marry each other are still together. Furthermore, those cohabiters who marry each other may be as much as 46 percent more likely to divorce than people who marry but have not cohabited first. The chances of commitment and permanence are better with marriage. Marriage is more likely to last than
cohabitation even in the early years of the relationship. According to 1997 data, 14.5 percent of first marriages of women who had never cohabited ended in separation, divorce, or annulment in the first five years, compared to 22.6 percent of first marriages of women who had cohabited (with anyone) before those marriages.  

Moreover, the breakup of a cohabiting relationship is not necessarily cleaner or easier than divorce. A breakup involves breaking up a household and may lead to conflicts over property, leases, past-due bills, etc. Breaking up is emotionally difficult for both cohabiters and any children of their own or previous relationships. Women in their late twenties and thirties experience an additional loss—their biological clocks have been ticking while they cohabited; when they break up, they have lost valuable time in which to find a marriageable partner and have children.

Second, cohabiters value independence more than noncohabiters; marriage involves less independence than living together. For example, cohabiters are less likely than marrieds to support or be financially responsible for their partners. They more often have separate bank accounts. Male cohabiters are more likely to value personal leisure and individual freedom. But this individual freedom may come with a price: they do not reap the benefits of a deeper and more intimate relationship.

Third, cohabiters are more likely than noncohabiters to have negative attitudes about marriage and are more likely to accept divorce as a solution to marriage problems. In addition, the longer cohabiting couples live together, the more negative their attitudes about marriage and childbearing are.

Finally, a pattern of "serial cohabitation" actually becomes a roadblock, rather than a prelude, to marriage. If one or both members of a couple has previously lived with someone else and the couple marries, the relationship between previous cohabitation(s) and later divorce is especially strong. The experience of dissolving cohabiting relationships probably generates a greater willingness to dissolve later relationships, including marriages. Such individuals may also have a relatively low tolerance for unhappiness in a relationship and choose to "bail out" rather than learn to work through differences.

**EIGHT REASONS WHY MARRIAGE IS BETTER THAN COHABITATION**

In a comparison of relationship benefits and costs, marriage wins over cohabitation. First, as described above, cohabitation lowers one's chances of marital satisfaction. Cohabiters also have a different perspective on time than marrieds have. Marriage, by definition, means, "I will always be here for you." Marrieds' long-term contract encourages emotional investment in the relationship. In contrast, cohabitation for most seems to mean, "I will be here only as long as the relationship meets my needs."

Thus, cohabiters feel less secure in their relationships. In addition, cohabiters are less likely than marrieds to view their sexual relationships...
as permanently exclusive—they are less faithful to their partners than spouses are. Even when they are faithful, they are less committed to sexual fidelity, which creates more insecurity. Second, cohabitation also affects the cohabiters’ children. In general, children’s emotional development is poorer if a parent is cohabiting than if a parent is married. This poor development is partly due to the high risk that the couple will break up. If the couple does separate, the children pay an economic price, since they have no right to child support from a partner who is not their biological parent. They also pay an emotional price when they lose a caring adult who may have taken a parental role but will do so no longer.

Third, living without both parents also increases the chance that a child will be abused. Boyfriends are disproportionately likely to sexually or physically abuse their girlfriend’s children. In fact, the most unsafe family environment for children is that in which the mother is living with someone other than the child’s biological father. These children may also have more behavioral problems compared to cohabiters—but marrieds usually monitor each other in a way that emphasizes “our spending plan” or budget. For most marrieds, “Your money is my money.” According to Waite and Gallagher, “This financial union is one of the cornerstones (along with sexual union) of what Americans mean by marriage.”

Fifth, married men earn more than single men (nearly twice as much) and married women have access to more of men’s earnings than if they are single or cohabiting. This may be explained by the increased financial responsibility men feel when they marry—many men have been heard to say, “Marriage made me get more serious about my career and making a good living.”

Financially, cohabiters live more like single parents than like married couples. Cohabiters are more likely to control their own finances than to work as a close team, helping each other meet their financial and career goals. Married women also benefit in some aspects of their careers. Many women get a slight earnings boost from marriage. Childless married women make 4–10 percent more than childless single women. Also, many married women report

**Marrieds have better sex lives than cohabiters.**
Whereas cohabiters live in noncommited relationships that value independence, marrieds promise to care for each other "in sickness and in health." There are many mental and physical health benefits of are lost at a high emotional cost similar to what people experience in a divorce.

Seventh, some people would be surprised to learn that marrieds have better sex lives than cohabitors. Although cohabiters have sex at least as often as marrieds, they are less likely to say they enjoy it. Marriage adds the essential ingredients of commitment and security to one's sex life, making it more satisfying. In addition, marrieds are more likely than cohabiters to perceive love and sex as intrinsically connected.

Finally, cohabitation may affect relationships with parents. In some families, cohabitation is no longer associated with sin, pathology, or parental disapproval. But in many families cohabitation is still considered morally wrong and embarrassing to extended family members. Cohabiters from those families risk damaging their relationships with their parents and experiencing the withdrawal of parental and extended family support for the relationship. Moreover, the transitory nature of cohabiting relationships may limit access to grandparents for children of cohabiting unions.

The longer a cohabiting couple lives together, the more negative their attitudes about marriage and childbearing are.

knowing there is another person who will take care of you when you cannot take care of yourself.

Compared to singles, married people as a group are also emotionally happier. Married couples are better connected to the larger community, including in-laws and church members who provide social and emotional support and material benefits. Although cohabiters may seem to gain some of the emotional benefits of marriage, in general, they are no better off than singles. Because cohabiting relationships are short-lived, any emotional health benefits last for a relatively short time. Only about 60 percent of cohabiting relationships end in marriage, so if the couple breaks up rather than marries, the benefits

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, thirty years of research show that for the benefit of men, women, and their children, marriage is superior to cohabitation. Cohabitation cannot provide or compete with the rewards and benefits of a strong, committed marriage. Cohabitation is not an effective "trial marriage," if such a thing exists. It does not provide divorce insurance. Couples will be better off on life's measures of success and happiness (e.g., emotional health, physical health, and personal wealth) if they are married rather than living together. Cohabitation has more costs than rewards but, unfortunately, continues to be popular, especially among young adults, even though cohabiters fail to receive the benefits or avoid the risks they think they will. People need to know that cohabitation fails to bring couples the happiness and stability they desire in a close personal relationship.

The current generation of young adults longs for satisfying and stable marriages, but is increasingly anxious about their ability to achieve them. Their fears will be calmed through better premarriage education and counseling. They will not be helped by alternatives to marriage
Cohabitation cannot substitute for the rewards and benefits of a strong, committed marriage.

that, although they appear reasonable and attractive, will not fulfill their promise and fail when compared to marriage. Marriage educators, university professors, public school teachers, premarriage counselors, the clergy, the media, and parents can provide this important information to our youth and begin to reinstate the institution of marriage as fundamental to personal and family success.

Fortunately, these recommendations come at a time when increasing numbers of people are working to support a marriage culture in our country. The marriage movement can be a helpful support and benefit to those who are married and those who are not. "Support for marriage ... does not require turning back the clock on desirable social change, promoting male tyranny, or tolerating domestic violence. ... Whether an individual ever personally marries or not, a healthy marriage culture benefits every person ..." [10]

The institution of marriage, which has been universally accepted as the way to provide for children and realize adult dreams, has also been affirmed by scholarly research as the way to increased health, happiness, and financial security. [12] Although the increase in cohabitation and its implications for marriage are still being studied, the statistics do not tell the entire story. A movement among young people, usually in religious settings, has led thousands of youth to promise to wait for sex until after they are married, thus foregoing cohabitation as well. These young adults have rejected the cultural changes that some of their peers accept as the norm.

Given the benefits of marriage to adults and children and the discouraging data about cohabitation, young people should be warned that the relationships they wish for and think they can achieve through cohabitation are more likely to be found in marriage. According to the best research available, cohabitation, like a mirage, holds out empty promises that disappear and even lead away from fulfillment of the hopes most people have for their lives. Even though people who marry do not always live "happily ever after," people who choose marriage instead of cohabitation choose the best beginning for their children and the best opportunity for lasting happiness. [8]

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Non-marital cohabitation is a social trend that leads to a number of problems for the cohabiting individuals, for children involved in the cohabiting relationship, and for society. We can help stem the tide. First, we can realize that the tide can be stemmed! Many social commentators, scholars, and policymakers seem to assume that cohabitation is only going to increase, so our sole option is to reduce the damage rather than stop the trend. This is simply not true. Look at what has happened with the tobacco issue over the last decade or so and you can see that, with enough evidence and concerted effort, damaging social trends can be slowed down and even reversed. Here are some of the specific things we can do to slow down and reverse the damaging trend of cohabitation:

For young adults:
1. *Don’t cohabit.* It is that simple. Just don’t do it. You save yourself, your partner, your family, your present or future children, and your society a lot of heartache and misery.
2. *Get the message out to your peer group.* The research shows that most young people believe cohabitation is a good choice, a good way to prepare for marriage or avoid the trauma of divorce. Help your peers understand that research does not support those assumptions. Help them see what the dangers are.

For parents:
1. *Be part of a happy, long-term, stable marriage.* The best way to help your children avoid cohabitation is to let them see their parents in a happy, stable marriage. If your marriage isn’t what you want it to be, get help. But don’t just jump out of your marriage—find a way to make it better, for your own sake as well as theirs.
2. *Teach your children the facts about cohabitation vs. marriage.* Teach them early about the value of good marriages and the pitfalls of non-marital cohabitation.
3. *Become involved in the movement to strengthen marriage in your community.* Many churches, community groups, and grass-roots organizations are working hard to help couples strengthen their marriages. Get involved, get trained to become a workshop leader, or help in any way you can. Let your children see how important this issue is to you.

For community, political, and church leaders:
1. *Lead out in supporting the family.* Publicly recognize the advantage of marriage for strong families, healthy children, and sound communities.
2. *Make resources (money, time, space, etc.) available.* Help your community to become "marriage-friendly" by supporting marriage-strengthening organizations in your communities, your churches, and among your constituents.

For marriage- and family-serving professionals:
1. *Share the research about cohabitation with your clients/students.* Help married couples understand that the needs of their children may need to take precedence over the desires of one individual. Assist them in understanding that such sacrifice can help not only the child, but also benefit them as individuals in the long run.
2. *Teach principles of wise spouse selection.* Help unmarried couples or single individuals understand the benefits of high-quality marriages for themselves, their posterity, and their communities. Help them understand the short- and long-term importance of the choice of a mate.

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"...a home is much more than a house.
A house is built of lumber, brick, and stone.
A home is made of love, sacrifice, and respect.
A house can be a home, and a home can
be a heaven when it shelters a family.
When true values and basic virtues undergird the
families of society, hope will conquer despair,
and faith will triumph over doubt."

—Thomas S. Monson