

SHOULD WE LIVE TOGETHER BEFORE WE GET MARRIED?

By Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott - Symbis Email - July 26, 2023

Thinking about moving in with your significant other before you tie the knot? Many dating or engaged couples question whether they should live together before marriage. While cohabitation might seem practical on the surface, research suggests that it's not as good for your relationship as you think. Before you make this life-changing decision, it's important to think about the potential outcomes.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE SCIENCE

There's a longstanding moral debate about whether cohabitation is healthy. Rather than leaning into that side of the argument, we'll take a science-backed approach. Researchers Scott Stanley and Galena Rhoades from the University of Denver recently conducted a nationwide survey, published by the Institute for Family Studies, that's called "*What's the Plan? Cohabitation, Engagement, and Divorce,*"

They looked at a couple's likelihood to divorce based on cohabitation. For example, 34% of those couples who lived together before marriage later divorced. On the other hand, couples who chose not to move in together until after engagement or marriage divorced at a rate of 23%.

INCIDENTAL VS. INTENTIONAL COMMITMENT

Stanley and Rhoades described the choice to cohabit before marriage as "*sliding*" into that dynamic. The nature of how they make this choice seems to be related to higher divorce rates. But couples who intentionally plan to get married before they cohabit appear to have a lower risk of getting divorced.

Getting married before you move in together means that you've made a commitment to each other to spend your lives together. That's vastly different from living together without that expectation. Instead, what could happen is that one of you believes the arrangement will lead to getting married, while the other may not.

THE GENDER DIVIDE IN COHABITATION

Other research shows a frequent difference in men's versus women's expectations when a couple lives together. Women tend to see moving in together as one step closer to marriage. On the other hand, men see it as one step further away from it.

While this simplifies the many differences in men's and women's views of cohabitation, it's important to note. If one of you is expecting to get married as a result of moving in together, you'll likely be disappointed if your significant other doesn't feel the same way.

PAUSE AND DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS

Before either of you jump right into living together, it's important to pause and talk about each of your expectations for the future. Talk about the research, too. Will taking this step now actually strengthen your relationship, or put it at risk?

The science behind moving in after marriage is compelling. Get very clear with one another before you make any decisions. This is the time to uncover significant misunderstandings or differences in what you each expect.