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## The Florida Bar FAMILY LAW SECTION

February 19, 2020

**Via Hand Delivery**  
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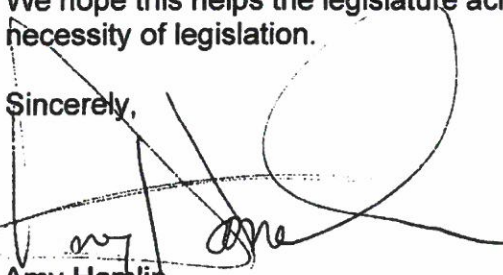
**RE: HB 319/SB 682 – Florida Healthy Marriage Handbook**

Dear Chair Yarborough:

The Family Law Section of The Florida Bar ("Section") reviewed this legislation which seeks to create a separate handbook to the Family Law Handbook the Section created pursuant to Section 741.0306, Florida Statutes. Pursuant to your request, to help streamline the process and avoid the necessity of a second, separate handbook, the Section agrees to include the attached information as a supplement to the Section's work product. The inclusion of this information allows persons to access all the information in one publication that will be available from the Clerk of the Circuit Court. Please know the Section is currently updating the Handbook which should be finalized by June 2020.

We hope this helps the legislature achieve its goals without the necessity of legislation.

Sincerely,

  
Amy Hamlin  
Chair  
Family Law Section  
The Florida Bar

# **Florida Healthy Marriage Information**

## **Introduction**

Congratulations on your decision to marry! This information is intended to help marriage license applicants have successful marriages. It includes topics such as learning to communicate effectively, building the team, solving problems collaboratively, and resolving conflicts. The information also provides general guidance on economic issues, raising a family, and the consequences that occur when marriages fail.

## **Building a Marriage**

As you and your spouse begin your journey together, the first thing you will need to know is where you are going. Your shared destination is determined by your personal and shared values. By understanding your mutual values, you are on the same road, going the same direction, using the same mode of transportation. The marriage journey will require lots of decisions from both of you. Through mutual respect, trust, honesty, and love, you will have a rewarding trip.

## **Understanding Your Values**

Your values are the foundation for all of your thinking and decision-making. Every decision you make is an effort to align your actions to your values. When you marry, you will be sharing your life with another person. It is so important that you know your own values and the values of your intended spouse. Your values and beliefs need to be compatible. Think about the values you consider sacred in your life and share this information with your partner. For example, if your faith and religion are important to you but are not important to your intended spouse, you may have a conflict of values.

Discuss these issues prior to making a marriage commitment. Build upon your mutual ideals. A harmonious, lasting marriage will be built upon a foundation of shared values and the effective communication of these values.

## **Building Your Team**

Marriage is a team effort. One of the definitions of the word team is “a group of persons pulling together.” Pulling together and sharing the same goals are crucial to an effective team. Team members usually have different roles and different tasks to perform, but they share the commitment to the team and the responsibility for the success of the team. Talking to each other and sharing in decisions that affect both team members is very important. Talking, listening, and valuing your partner’s ideas and contributions will make your marriage team strong and healthy.

## **Learning Effective Communication**

Refocusing your own thinking helps to calm emotions. You can redirect your thinking -- and your partner's -- to what you both really want: an activity or mutual goal, something more satisfying than the conflict. Couples can change their conflict experiences by changing their thoughts about the situation.

### **Keeping the Marriage Vital**

When you first get married, usually everything is new and exciting. But how do you keep your marriage new and exciting year after year? You have started a lifelong journey together. This journey will have many stops along the way. Each of your destinations will bring maturity to your relationship and to each of you. Your affection for each other increases through the lessons that you learn together and the laughter and the tears that you share. It is a good journey! The key to a successful marriage is having mutual values, goals, and interests; loving and living; and, living and loving together. Couples who can laugh together under challenging circumstances and gain the understanding of true friendship keep their marriage vital.

### **Addressing Economic Issues**

As you prepare for your new journey as a couple, you have several financial issues to discuss. What financial resources and obligations do you bring into your marriage? Do you have business debts? Will you combine your finances and have joint checking and savings accounts or maintain separate accounts? Who will pay the bills? Will you develop a budget together? Talking to each other about how you plan to earn, spend, and save your money is easier when you agree on priorities. Your marriage benefits from forming and sticking to a spending plan that includes discussion and agreement.

### **Sharing Financial Responsibilities**

It is wise to make major financial decisions together. You both will be responsible for those decisions. If you are uncomfortable at the thought of sharing financial responsibilities with your intended spouse, you might want to seek premarital counseling to determine underlying issues and to decide if marriage is the right decision for you at this time.

One of you may be better at balancing a checkbook, paying the bills, and developing a budget. As you take this marital journey with your partner, talk with each other about which one of you is best suited to do specific financial tasks. Then, after you are married, try out your new system! Adjust it if it doesn't work well.

Here are some specific financial planning tips. Decide together:

If you will maintain one joint checking account or separate individual checking accounts. Who will pay the bills and maintain the checking account(s)? How often and how much personal allowance each of you should receive. What is an appropriate savings and investment plan? How you will pay for large purchases such as automobiles and major appliances.

### **Building a Budget**

Parenthood is a lifetime commitment. It requires emotional maturity from both partners. Raising children can be the most satisfying experience when both of you are ready to make this unselfish commitment.

### **Taking Responsibility for Raising Children**

The decision to have children needs to be mutual. Children bring an enormous change to your relationship with each other. Some of the spontaneity that you once had as a couple may change. Fatigue from early childcare demands and feelings of uncertainty in your new roles can cause temporary marital stress. Career and childcare decisions, economic implications and new financial demands, and new housing requirements will need to be discussed. But the joys of parenthood outweigh the tensions of change.

Raising a child is a team effort and requires both partners to be active participants. You are bringing into the world a new human being who will require your full support physically, emotionally, socially, instructionally, and economically. Both of you are responsible for your child's care. This mutual responsibility for the care of your child or children never ends. When you agreed to have a child, you signed on for life. Your successful marriage is the crucial foundation on which to build a healthy home that will nurture your children. A married two-parent household generally provides a better standard of living (more money), more time to be with children, and stronger family bonds.

### **Coping with Family Challenges**

Sometimes raising children can be very difficult. You may find that you need help. Some children have problems making friends, getting along in school, and staying out of trouble with the law. Family counseling can strengthen families by providing a safe place to explore issues and resolve problems.

### **Walking Rocky Roads**

If sad times start to outweigh happy times with your spouse, you are walking a lonely, rocky road in your marriage. Examine your own life, your spouse's life, and your relationship with each other. If you and your spouse can renew your love and commitment to each other, together you can remove the obstructions in your marriage. Professional counselors and/or members of the clergy may help you remove some of the boulders in your marriage path. Depending on the type of problems you encounter, you may find specific support groups and counseling classes to help you. Also refer to the phone book or online directories for listings of counselors, support groups, religious organizations, and other community resources.

### **Conclusion**

The provision of this information is one way the State of Florida is showing its support of your decision to marry. The information is intended to be a basic roadmap to guide you. The State of Florida hopes that you have a happy and healthy marriage! **Again, Congratulations!**