Marriage and Partnership is Volume 396 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
Is the institution of marriage still relevant to contemporary Australians? We are spending less time within the institution of marriage because we are marrying later, and not necessarily remaining married for life.

The proportion of separated or divorced Australians has remained stable over the past decade, while the continuing increase in cohabiting offsets the continuing decrease in those living together in marriage. As a result, the overall proportion of Australians living in any kind of residential partnership has remained steady at around 60 per cent over the past decade.

Why do people get married, and why do many choose de facto partnerships, which is often a pathway to marriage? Where do same-sex unions fit into the picture? Are de facto relationships more unstable than marriages?

This book explores marriage and partnering trends in Australia, and offers some general advice on how to overcome relationship difficulties and successfully work at lasting couple relationships. For better or worse, marriage remains relevant to most Australians, at some stage in their lives.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
Marriages and divorces in Australia

The latest data and information about marriages registered and divorces granted in Australia, from the Australian Bureau of Statistics

This publication provides data and information about marriages registered and divorces granted in Australia in 2014 on a state or territory of registration basis rather than a state or territory of usual residence. The publication presents statistics on the number of marriages registered, crude marriage rates, median age at marriage, age-specific marriage rates, previous marital status, use of marriage celebrants, country of birth of those marrying, and living arrangements for couples prior to marriage. Divorce statistics in this publication provide state, territory and national level data for the number of divorces granted, crude divorce rates, ages at marriage, separation and divorce, age-specific divorce rates, divorces involving children, duration of marriage prior to divorce, and applicants for divorce.

KEY POINTS

- There were 121,197 marriages registered and 46,498 divorces granted in Australia in 2014. Over the past five years there has been a gradual increase in the median age at separation and divorce. This aligns with a gradual increase in the median age at first marriage.

Marriages

- The number of marriages increased in 2014 by 2,238 (1.9%) and the crude marriage rate increased from 5.1 in 2013 to 5.2 marriages per 1,000 estimated resident population in 2014.
- Civil celebrants have overseen the majority of marriages since 1999 and the proportion of marriage ceremonies overseen by a civil celebrant increased again to 74.1 per cent of all marriages in 2014.
- In 2014, the majority of brides (81.2%) and grooms (79.7%) had not been married before.
- The median age at marriage in 2014 was 31.5 years for males and 29.6 years for females. The median age at marriage has remained stable for males since 2013, while for females it increased by 0.1 years.

Divorces

- The number of divorces decreased by 1,140 (2.4%) in 2014 and the crude divorce rate decreased from 2.1 in 2013 to 2.0 divorces per 1,000 estimated resident population in 2014.
- The median duration from marriage to divorce in 2014 was 12.0 years, a slight decrease from 12.1 years reported in 2013.
- The median age at divorce for males was 45.2 years of age and the median age of females was 42.5 years of age for those divorces granted in 2014.
- The largest proportion of divorce applications were from joint applicants, accounting for 41.5% of divorces. Female applicants accounted for 32.5% of divorce applications while male applicants accounted for 26.0%.

SUMMARY TABLES

Marriages

In 2014, there were 121,197 marriages registered in Australia, an increase of 2,238 (1.9%) from the 118,959 marriages registered in 2013. The crude marriage rate also increased from 5.1 to 5.2 marriages per 1,000 estimated resident population.
1.1 SELECTED MARRIAGE INDICATORS(a), AUSTRALIA, SELECTED YEARS, 1994-2014

| Marriage and Partnership Issues in Society | Volume 396 |

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<th>Marriages registered</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012(b)</th>
<th>2013(b)</th>
<th>2014</th>
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<td>Crude marriage rate(c)</td>
<td>rate</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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### Previous marital status

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<td>First marriage one partner</td>
<td>20,159</td>
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### Marriage celebrant

**Ministers of religion(d)**

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<td>36,375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
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<td>56.9</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
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**Civil celebrants(d)**

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<td>Proportion</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>71.9</td>
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### Relative birthplace of couple(e)

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<td>67,882</td>
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<td>65,605</td>
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<td>Both born in the same overseas country</td>
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<td>9,686</td>
<td>14,588</td>
<td>15,319</td>
<td>15,439</td>
<td>15,728</td>
<td>16,188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Born in different countries</td>
<td>30,652</td>
<td>32,630</td>
<td>37,925</td>
<td>38,488</td>
<td>38,686</td>
<td>37,553</td>
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### Cohabitation prior to marriage

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<td>na</td>
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<td>95,197</td>
<td>95,226</td>
<td>95,670</td>
<td>91,120</td>
<td>96,223</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of all marriages</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>75.5</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>76.6</td>
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(a) See Glossary for definitions of terms used.

(b) Care should be taken in interpreting Victorian data from 2012 and 2013 as the category values are calculated from a weighted sample.

c. Marriages per 1,000 of estimated resident population at 30 June for each reference year respectively.

(d) Excludes marriages where the rite is not stated or not defined. Registers of ministers of religion are maintained by states and territories under the authority of the Marriage Act 1961. Data on religious marriage rites are classified to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG), 2011 (cat. no. 1266.0).

e. Excludes marriages where country of birth of one or both partners is not stated.

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The median age of males and females at marriage was 31.5 and 29.6 years respectively in 2014. The median age at marriage for males has remained steady at 31.5, while the median age at marriage for females has increased by 0.1 years since 2013.

The proportion of marriage ceremonies performed by civil celebrants has continued to increase in 2014, with civil celebrants performing 74.1% of all registered marriage ceremonies, an increase from 72.5% in 2013.

Couples who lived together prior to marriage accounted for 79.4% of all marriages registered in 2014, an increase from the 76.6% recorded in 2013.

Marriages where both partners were marrying for the first time accounted for 72.5% of all marriage in 2014. The number of marriages where one partner was marrying for the first time decreased by 0.3 percentage points to 16.0% in 2014, while the proportion of remarriages for both partners increased from 11.4% in 2013 to 11.5% in 2014.

In 2014, 54.5% of couples married were both born in Australia, 31.7% were born in different countries, and 13.3% were born in the same overseas country.

**Divorces**

In 2014, there were 46,498 divorces granted in Australia, a decrease of 1,140 (2.4%) from the 47,638 divorces granted in 2013.

The crude divorce rate for the number of divorces per 1,000 estimated resident population reported for 2013 was 2.1 divorces per 1,000 estimated resident population.

The median age of males and females at divorce was 45.2 and 42.5 years respectively in 2014. Median age at divorce in 2014 has increased by 0.4 years for males and 0.3 years for females from 2013.

In 2014, divorces involving children represented 47.0% of all divorces granted compared with 47.4% in 2013. The number of children involved in divorces totalled 40,152 in 2014, a decrease from the 41,747 reported in 2013. The average number of children per divorce involving children in 2014 was 1.8.

The median duration from marriage to divorce in 2014 was 12.0 years, a slight decrease from that reported in 2013. This number has been decreasing from a peak of 12.6 years in 2005.

Over the last 20 years, the proportion of divorces granted as result of joint applications for divorce has been increasing. This has continued in 2014 to the point where joint applicants are the highest applicant type for the fifth year in a row, with 19,281 divorces granted from joint applications, compared with 15,127 from female applicants and 12,090 from male applicants.

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AUSTRALIAN CENSUS: FOR BETTER OR WORSE, MARRIAGE PERSISTS

Partnerships may be changing, but Australians are still getting married. In this article courtesy of The Conversation, Genevieve Heard has a look at the institution of marriage. Is it still relevant to Australians? The data says yes.

As the issue of access to marriage in Australia continues to fuel social and political debate, it is timely to reflect on the vitality of the institution. Newly released data from the 2011 census permit just such an assessment.

For decades, we have heard that marriage is on the wane, in Australia and across the secular West. The true picture is somewhat more complex.

THE MARRIED MINORITY

Certainly, the married proportion of the total population has been falling. It is no longer the case that a majority of the population is married.

In 2011, 49% of Australians aged 15 and over were in a registered marriage, down from 51% in 2001. Taking a longer view, the married proportion was as high as 64% during the mid-20th century marriage boom. Although this peak was historically unusual, we must go back to 1901 to find another census year in which the married population was less than half the total population aged 15 and older.

The proportion of marriages has fallen in all age groups up to and including 65-69 years. Slightly increased proportions among those aged 70 years and older may reflect continuing improvements in life expectancy and partner survival, rather than any change in propensity to marry.

The decrease among Australians aged 50-54 years and 55-59 years has been greatest – more than three percentage points since 2006, and seven percentage points since 2001.

POPULAR PARTNERSHIPS

So the proportion of Australians who are married has been falling across successive census years, but does this really measure the popularity of marriage? After all, the census is merely a snapshot of the Australian population at one point in time, and of those who were married at this point in time.

It can be more instructive to consider proportions ever married (counting those who indicated they were separated, divorced or widowed, as well as those who were married).
These data testify to the continuing popularity of marriage. At the 2011 census, the proportion ever married exceeded 70% at 35-39 years of age, exceeded 90% at 55-59 years, and peaked at 96% among those aged 75-79 years, 80-84 years and 85 years or more.

To a large extent, the figures for older Australians reflect the marriage trends of decades past, rather than recent trends. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue that marriage is on the wane when the institution remains the dominant partnership model for adult Australians.

THE RISE OF DE FACTO RELATIONSHIPS

It may be more accurate to claim that Australians are spending less time within the institution of marriage. This is because we are marrying later, and are not necessarily remaining married for life. The proportion of Australians who were separated or divorced has remained stable over the decade to 2011, at 11%.

Of course, many Australians – almost 10% of those aged 15 years and over in 2011, compared to 7% in 2001 – live in de facto marriages, or cohabiting relationships. The prevalence of cohabitation varies greatly by age group, peaking at 22% among those aged 25-29 years. This category includes same-sex as well as opposite-sex partnerships (this was not the first time that same-sex relationships were enumerated, but it was the first time same-sex couples were able to describe their partners as ‘husband’ or ‘wife’).

SETTLING DOWN, LIVING APART

The continuing increase in proportions cohabiting offsets the continuing decrease in proportions married, such that the overall proportion of Australians living in any kind of residential partnership has remained steady at 59% over the past decade.

Proportions living with a partner are highest at ages 35-39 and 40-44 years. Even so, one quarter of Australians in these age groups are not living with a partner. In the group aged 30-34 years, over 30% are not living with a partner.

We know that some of these have previously been married, and we cannot tell how many have previously lived in de facto marriages. Many, however, have simply delayed family formation beyond the ages at which young adults were once expected to ‘settle down’.

Finally, it is important to note that the census does not capture all committed relationships or self-defined partnerships. Specifically, those in ‘living-apart-together’ relationships – those who identify themselves as being in a relationship with someone who does not reside in the same household – are effectively hidden. This proportion has been estimated at 9% of the adult population, or 24% of those who were not cohabiting or married.

The census cannot tell us everything about contemporary Australian partnerships, but it reveals much. For better or worse, marriage remains relevant to most Australians – at some stage.

Genevieve Heard is research fellow, at the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University.
PARTNERING AND MARRIAGE

These results from a survey by Relationships Australia reveal how people met their partner or spouse, and the reasons why relationships break down.

Overall – across all age groups, respondents met their partners principally through friends, at social occasions or at work. While 4% of all respondents met their partners online, 13% of those aged between 25 and 34 met their partners online, a trend likely to increase over coming years.

While the main challenge across most age groups in finding a partner was meeting enough people, a

<table>
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<th>HOW PEOPLE MET SPOUSE/PARTNER – BY AGE</th>
<th>18-24</th>
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<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70+</th>
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<td>Through friends</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>At work</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through family</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
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A significant proportion of respondents aged in the two brackets between 18 and 34 cited ‘emotional issues’ as being another significant challenge. 12% of respondents with a household income over $80,000 indicated that finding a compatible partner with the same interests was the main challenge, compared with 6% of respondents with a household income under $60,000.

Love, companionship and signifying a life-long commitment were the three principal reasons given for respondents deciding to marry.

Love, companionship and signifying a life-long commitment were the three principal reasons given for respondents deciding to marry. One shift between the 2011 and 2008 surveys lay in the numbers of people wanting to make a public commitment to each other, with a significant drop in this as a motivator in 2011 compared with three years ago.

When asked what factors had impacted negatively on partner relationships, respondents indicated that stress, work pressures and lack of time to spend together had the greatest impact.

The four main reasons cited for relationship breakdown were financial stress, communication difficulties, different expectations and values, and lack of trust. Compared with 2008 data, financial stress and communication difficulties are less problematic, and different expectations and values, and lack of trust are significantly increasing factors.

<table>
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<td>Communication difficulties</td>
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<td>Different expectations / values</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Lack of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infidelity* / partners lose interest / meet other people</td>
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<tr>
<td>People grow apart* / change over time / not compatible</td>
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<td>Not spending time together</td>
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<td>Immaturity / selfishness</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding / compromise</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting married too young</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Insecurity / jealousy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* New code added in 2011

Question: How did you meet your spouse or partner?
Base: All respondents with spouse / live in partner / de facto spouse (n=861).

Question: Either from your own experiences or those of family and friends, what do you think are the main reasons why partner relationships break down?
Base: All respondents.

Relationships Australia provides counselling for individuals couples and families; parenting and relationship education; support for families going through separation; workplace counselling and training; employee assistance programs for companies; and training for family support professionals.

Relationships Australia is part of a national network of over 150 centres.

HAPPILY EVER ... BEFORE AND AFTER
INFORMATION FOR COUPLES PLANNING TO MARRY
A PRE-MARRIAGE PREPARATION GUIDE FROM FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE

This information is provided pursuant to subsection 42(5A) of the Marriage Act 1961 and regulation 39A of the Marriage Regulations 1963.

MARRIAGE IS IMPORTANT

Your celebrant is handing you this document because the decision to marry is one of the biggest decisions a couple can make. Marriage is a significant step which will bring a number of changes for you, your spouse and your family.

This document tells you:
- The process of getting married in Australia
- Some important legal consequences of getting married, and
- Where relationship support services, such as marriage education, family counselling or dispute resolution services may be obtained.

GETTING MARRIED IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, marriage is regulated by the Marriage Act 1961, which sets out the process for getting married and the legal requirements of a valid marriage.

1. A completed Notice of Intended Marriage form must be given to your celebrant at least one month (and up to 18 months) before the wedding.
2. You and your partner must provide your celebrant with evidence of your date and place of birth, identity and the end of any previous marriages.
3. You must both sign the ‘Declaration of no legal impediment to marriage’. By signing the Declaration, you declare that you believe that you are of marriageable age, and that there is no legal impediment to your marriage.
4. On your wedding day, your celebrant will solemnise your marriage. Your celebrant will then ask you, your partner and your witnesses to sign up to three marriage certificates.
5. After your wedding, your marriage celebrant will register the marriage with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the state or territory where your marriage took place.

MARRIAGE IN AUSTRALIA: SOME IMPORTANT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Health and welfare benefits

If you receive health or welfare benefits, you will need to contact the relevant agencies to advise them that you have married. These agencies will advise you if your benefits will change. You may lose benefits and even be penalised if you fail to tell them you have married within a reasonable time after the wedding.

Changing your name

Any person who marries may choose to take their spouse’s surname. You are not legally required to take your spouse’s surname once you are married.

If you wish to take your spouse’s surname, you must obtain a certificate of marriage issued by your state or territory Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. This is usually sufficient evidence to have your personal documentation (e.g. driver’s licence) changed to your married surname.

The certificate you received on your wedding day is ceremonial and will not meet the identity requirements of many government agencies, such as the passport office.
Citizenship

If you marry an Australian citizen, you do not have an automatic right to Australian citizenship. You will still need to apply for citizenship and satisfy the eligibility criteria.

You can obtain further information from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection website at www.immi.gov.au

Making a will

Marriage will invalidate any previous wills unless your will clearly shows you were planning this marriage when you made it.

It is important that you make a new will when your personal circumstances change. This ensures that you have a valid will that gives effect to your intentions about how you want your assets to be distributed in the event of your death. A solicitor can help you make or change a will.

Taxation after marriage

When you marry, the amount of taxation you pay may change. It is advisable to contact the Australian Taxation Office, a tax agent or an accountant before marriage to discuss any tax implications.

STRENGTHENING YOUR MARRIAGE

Before marriage: marriage education

Solid relationships set you up to meet the changes and challenges of life. It is important to develop good communication and sound relationship skills early, so that you can fall back on these skills during difficult times.

Pre-marriage education prepares couples for marriage by providing skills and information to build lifelong marriages. Courses are also available to explore the added dimension and complexity brought to a marriage by children from a previous relationship.

During marriage: family counselling

Keeping relationships on track is not always easy. Relationship problems can arise at various stages of our lives. While having a shaky moment does not mean your relationship is in trouble, it may be a sign that you could do with some help.

Family counselling can help couples come to terms with the many changes that happen during a marriage, such as the personal and interpersonal issues to do with children and family. Family counsellors can help you work through emotional problems with your spouse or partner, or to reach agreement about your parental responsibilities.

Marriage breakdown: family dispute resolution

Family dispute resolution (FDR) can help separating couples to reach agreement about property, money, and – most importantly – any children. The law requires separating families who have a parenting
dispute to make a genuine effort to try to sort it out through FDR.

An accredited FDR Practitioner can help you discuss issues, look at options, and reach agreement. Importantly, FDR can help you to develop a parenting plan to set out arrangements for any children.

For more information about the services and advice available for couples and families, visit the Family Relationships Online website at www.familyrelationships.gov.au or phone the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.


Why do people get married?

FINDINGS FROM THE RELATIONSHIPS INDICATORS SURVEY CONDUCTED BY RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA AND CUA IN 2008

WHY DO PEOPLE GET MARRIED

According to the Relationships Indicators Survey conducted by Relationships Australia and CUA in 2008, the reasons why people get married are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionship</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To signify a lifelong commitment</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security for children</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make a public commitment to each other</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For legal status or for financial security</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of religious beliefs</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to family pressure</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for a special occasion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHY PEOPLE DON’T GET MARRIED

Based on the 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey, the main reasons people do not get married are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad previous experience</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of commitment</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong commitment does not need marriage</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of making a mistake</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for a singles lifestyle</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of divorce and what goes with it</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage will interfere with work and career</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for multiple relationships</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for travel</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Relationships Australia, Why do people get married?
One third of Australian marriages involve at least one person who has been married before. Many of these marriages include children from a previous relationship. Starting a new life together is exciting, but it can also present challenges to a couple in their relationship as partners, parents and step-parents. However, many couples in this situation are aware of the difficulties in establishing a successful relationship, given their previous experiences, and commit strongly to making it work.

Some people adjust to the end of a marriage more quickly and easily than others. Even if you were unhappy, it sometimes takes longer than you might expect to come to terms with the end of a marriage and then move on.

Before you decide to remarry, ask yourself:
- Can I put the thoughts and emotions of my first marriage behind me?
- Can I recognise some of the things that contributed to the breakdown of my previous relationship?
- Am I emotionally ready to commit to a new partnership (and potentially, a new family)?

Choose your second marriage partner carefully

Be realistic about the type of person you want to marry. It is important to reflect on what worked and what didn’t work in your first marriage, and to confirm what makes you compatible with your partner. If you have children, you also need to consider how your marriage will affect them. Talk to your children about your remarriage and about how they are feeling.

Living and financial arrangements for a second marriage

Often difficulties arise in stepfamilies when a partner moves into an existing home, particularly if there are children. Children who have had full access to the family home are unlikely to welcome newcomers, as they will mean having to share resources. Conflict is highly likely in these situations. In the same way, the partner who lived in the home first is likely to consider that it is their home – this may cause arguments which will have a negative impact on the relationship.

Given this, it may be in the best interests of the new stepfamily to buy ‘our’ house if possible. It is also important to discuss how money will be distributed. Should you open both joint and separate bank accounts, so that money can be allocated for children from the former relationship or for individual needs? Money is often a measure of power and it is important that both members of a couple feel that they have influence in a relationship. These are important issues to discuss before – not after – you move in together.

Learning to live in a stepfamily

When a stepfamily is created, it takes time and effort for everyone to feel comfortable and to adjust to a life together. Step-parents need to learn ways to relate to stepchildren, both in showing affection and providing discipline. Children need time to negotiate new roles and relationships.

Research shows that it is often best if the child’s biological parent takes care of discipline, otherwise there could be a risk that the child sees the step-parent in a negative light because he or she does not...
Starting a new life together is exciting, but it can also present challenges to a couple in their relationship as partners, parents and step-parents. However, many couples in this situation are aware of the difficulties in establishing a successful relationship, given their previous experiences, and commit strongly to making it work.

have the same bond with the child. It is also very important to make every effort to treat each child the same way.

**Acknowledging that stepfamilies are different**

Be prepared for the stepfamily to be different from your previous experience of family in various ways including:

- In contrast to other family types, stepfamilies are formed as a result of loss, either in the form of the separation of parents or the death of a parent. Children who may have hoped that their parents would reunite are faced with the reality that this will not happen. As a result, children may still be grieving or be distressed from the break-up of the first marriage and this can make it difficult to adjust.
- There are many more family relationships in stepfamilies. There are usually a parent, grandparents and extended family members from the first marriage to consider.
- Life has changed, so problems will arise. Stepfamilies often go through particular stages, which include fantasy (hopes of a Brady Bunch), confusion (fantasy not coming true), crazy time (division between members), stability (adjustment) and commitment (acceptance of the situation and being prepared to work through issues).
- There are more parents in a stepfamily and the parenting may be shared by someone outside the family.

**Seeking help about your second marriage**

If you are having doubts about remarrying or need some help working through some relationship issues, you may find it valuable to talk about your difficulties with a relationship counsellor. Counselling can also help you face the challenges of your second marriage. A good couple bond is at the basis of a successful stepfamily.

**Where to get help**

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) – National Register (family and relationship therapy), Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors, Tel. 1800 806 054
- Family Relationship Advice Line, Tel. 1800 050 321 Monday
to Friday, 8am to 8pm; Saturday, 10am to 4pm
• Relationships Australia Victoria, Tel. 1300 364 277
• Stepfamilies Australia, Tel: (03) 9663 6733
• Kids Helpline, Tel. 1800 55 1800
• Men’s Line Australia, Tel. 1300 78 99 78

Things to remember
• Be sure that you are emotionally free to remarry.
• Allow time for new relationships to develop.
• Treat each other with respect.
• Be prepared for the stepfamily to be different from your previous experience of family.
• Consider the needs of children involved.

This fact sheet was produced in consultation with and approved by Relationships Australia Victoria.

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Be realistic about the type of person you want to marry. It is important to reflect on what worked and what didn’t work in your first marriage, and to confirm what makes you compatible with your partner. If you have children, you also need to consider how your marriage will affect them. Talk to your children about your remarriage and about how they are feeling.
Recognition of same-sex relationships

Same-sex de facto couples and their families have the same entitlements as opposite-sex de facto couples and their families, according to the Department of Social Services.

REMOVING DISCRIMINATION
The Government’s same-sex law reform package passed through Parliament in November 2008. The reform removed discrimination against same-sex de facto couples and their families in areas such as taxation, superannuation, social security and family assistance, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net and the Medicare Safety Net, aged care, veterans’ entitlements, immigration, citizenship and child support and family law.

For more information on the same-sex law reform package go to the Attorney-General’s Department website at www.ag.gov.au

EQUAL TREATMENT
The changed laws mean some same-sex couples and their families are now entitled to receive benefits previously not accessible.

Entitlements may include:
- Partner concession card benefits
- Bereavement benefits if a partner dies
- Exemption of the family home from the assets test when one partner enters nursing home care and the other partner continues to reside there
- Recognition as independent for Youth Allowance if in a same-sex relationship for over 12 months
- Lesbian relationships recognised as a qualifying relationship for Widow Allowance
- War widow or widowers pension
- Access to the Child Support Scheme
- Access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare safety nets as a family
- Allowing private sector superannuation trustees to make same-sex couples and their children eligible for reversionary benefits
- Enabling reversionary benefits from Commonwealth (defined benefit) superannuation schemes to be conferred on same-sex partners and the children of same-sex relationships
- Tax concessions.

Some same-sex couples and their families may have their benefits reduced to the same entitlements received by opposite-sex couples and their families in the same circumstances.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE
From 1 July 2009 changes to social security and family assistance legislation mean that all couples are recognised, regardless of the gender of a partner.

Same-sex couples now receive the same entitlements, are assessed in the same way, and have the same obligations, as opposite-sex couples. Social security and family assistance payments may be affected depending on individual circumstances and the type of payment received. Most payments are assessed based on the combined income and assets of both partners.

If you are in a same-sex relationship and are living together, or usually live together as a same-sex couple you need to advise Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office. If you don’t advise Centrelink your entitlements might be overpaid and will have to be repaid.

The Centrelink Financial Information Service (FIS) is a free, confidential service that can help you make informed financial decisions. FIS officers can provide information over the phone, at personal interviews, and through financial-education seminars held in a
range of locations across Australia. To find out more go to the Department of Human Services website at www.humanservices.gov.au

Centrelink social workers are also available to provide counselling, support and referral services as needed. To speak to a Centrelink social worker call 13 1794 or to make an appointment to see a social worker at your local DHS Service Centre go to Department of Human Services website.

**DAD AND PARTNER PAY**

Dad and Partner Pay is a new payment under the Australian Government’s Paid Parental Leave scheme. It’s now available to eligible working dads or partners (including adopting parents and same-sex partners) who care for a child born or adopted from 1 January 2013.

It provides up to two weeks of government-funded pay at the rate of the National Minimum Wage (currently about $606 per week before tax). For more information go to the The Department of Human Services website.

**CHILD SUPPORT**

If you are a parent, or non-parent carer, and have children from a previous same-sex relationship you may be eligible for child support.

If you have a child from a previous same-sex relationship you must take reasonable action to obtain child support to get more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A for that child. If you do not take reasonable action, you may have to repay some of your Family Tax Benefit Part A.

For more information go to the Department of Human Services (Separated parents page) website at www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/themes/child-support-and-separated-parents

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

- What is a member of a couple for social security and family assistance purposes?
  A person is regarded a member of a couple if they live with (or usually live with) their partner, and are either:
  - Married
  - In a registered relationship (opposite-sex or same-sex)
  - In a de facto relationship (opposite-sex or same-sex).

- What is a registered relationship?
- What is a defacto relationship?
- What are the factors that are considered when assessing members of a couple?

For more information and answers to these questions go to the Department of Human Services website at www.humanservices.gov.au


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12 reasons why marriage equality matters

Australian Marriage Equality, an organisation campaigning for gay and lesbian marriage, puts forward its reasons for legalising same-sex marriage

1. Many same-sex couples want to marry

Same-sex couples want to marry for all the same reasons as their opposite-sex counterparts. These reasons include: for legal security, to publicly celebrate their commitment, to provide greater legal protection for their children, or simply because they are in love.

According to a national study by researchers at the University of Queensland, 54% of Australian same-sex partners would marry if they had the choice. 80% of Australians in same-sex relationships support marriage equality even if they do not wish to marry.

First, we will look at the benefits that flow to same-sex couples who marry. This is followed by the wider social benefits that come from removing discrimination from the Marriage Act and ensuring equality for same-sex couples.

2. The legal benefits that come with marriage

Married partners have immediate access to all relationship entitlements, protections and responsibilities. This contrasts to de facto couples who must live together for a certain period before they are deemed to have legal rights.

A marriage certificate also allows married partners to easily prove their legal rights if challenged, for example in emergency situations. The capacity to quickly and easily prove one’s relationship status is particularly important for same-sex partners because prejudice against same-sex relationships can mean legal rights are denied.

Another practical benefit of marriage is that it is a widely recognised legal relationship. The criteria for establishing de facto status, and the rights ascribed to de facto partners, are different between the Australian states and between Australia and other nations.

3. The other benefits that come with marriage

Allowing same-sex couples to be included in such a universal and valued institution as marriage will provide them and their families with real social and cultural benefits.

Landmark research led by Lee Badgett, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts, describes and quantifies some of these benefits in two different places that have allowed same-sex marriages for several years, the Netherlands and Massachusetts.

Badgett found that same-sex partners overwhelmingly:

- Felt marriage had increased their commitment and their sense of responsibility, and had generally strengthened their relationships
- Believed their children were better off after their marriage, chiefly through legal protection for those children and enhanced feelings of security, stability and acceptance in the children, and
- Felt participation and acceptance in their extended families and communities had increased because of their marriage

Her conclusion was that: “Overall, the experiences of same-sex couples in two countries, the United States and the Netherlands, suggests that same-sex couples and their families are strengthened by a policy of marriage equality for same-sex couples.”

There is also a growing body of research showing that married partners, including same-sex married partners, are, on average, healthier, happier and longer lived, than their cohabiting peers, or singles. According to the US Centre for Disease Control, even rates of heart disease, drug use and stress are lower among married partners.

4. Same-sex attracted Australians want to be treated equally

Australia’s ban on same-sex marriage doesn’t only disadvantage those same-sex partners who seek to marry. It disadvantages all same-sex attracted Australians,
including those who are not in a relationship, or who would not marry, even if they could.

It does this by treating them as legally unequal to their heterosexual counterparts, and by not allowing them the same life choices.

Governments restrictions on who gay and lesbian Australians can marry violates their fundamental human rights in the same way the rights of Aboriginal Australians and African Americans were once violated by laws which prevented from marrying who they wished.

The association between the equality in marriage and freedom from second-class status is well understood in the context of the struggle for the civil rights of people of colour.

In 1958, in the midst of the struggle for black civil rights in America, Martin Luther King Jr declared:

“When any society says that I cannot marry a certain person, that society has cut off a segment of my freedom.”

Consider all the other groups in society, along with people of colour and same-sex attracted people, who at one time or another have been denied the right to marry the partner of their choice: women, people from differing faiths, people with disabilities.

What they all have in common is that they have been regarded as too immature or irresponsible to make what is arguably the most important decision any individual can ever make, the choice of a life-long partner.

In the same vein, the gradual acceptance that members of these groups are fully adult, fully citizens and fully human, has been accompanied by an acceptance of their right to marry whomever they wished.

5. Marriage inequality fosters discrimination in other areas

Exclusion of same-sex attracted people from marriage also sends out the message that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is acceptable.

This negative messages is amplified by the fact that, since 85 federal laws were amended to recognise same-sex de facto partners in 2008, the Marriage Act is the only remaining federal law which still discriminates, and because marriage is considered an important legal and social institution.

The negative message sent out by discrimination in marriage foster prejudice, discrimination and unequal treatment against same-sex relationships in the wider community.

There is a substantial body of Australian social research which shows the vulnerability of same-sex attracted people to prejudice, discrimination and unequal treatment. These surveys have consistently found that same-sex attracted people experience unacceptably high levels discrimination in the workplace, discrimination in other aspects of their lives including at school and in their families, and hate-motivated assault.

Studies have also directly linked bans on same-sex marriages to higher levels of discrimination.

While marriage equality will not remove all prejudice, discrimination and unequal treatment against same-sex attracted people, it will be an important step towards this goal.

6. Marriage inequality has an adverse impact on health and wellbeing

Worst of all, Australia’s ban on same-sex marriages disadvantages same-sex attracted people by sending out the message that they are less capable of love and commitment than heterosexual people.

It says their relationships are less stable, less resilient and of less value to the partners involved and their family and friends.

These negative messages, plus the devaluation and discrimination already cited, have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of same-sex attracted people and their families.

Same-sex attracted Australians are more likely to experience below-average health outcomes including higher levels of depression, due to this prejudice and discrimination. The statistics are particularly alarming for younger and newly-identifying LGBTI people who have consistently higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, early school leaving, conflict with peers and parents and suicide ideation, all directly related to the discrimination and prejudice they experience.

A number of researchers have shown there is a direct link between legal bans on same-sex marriage and higher levels of stress and anxiety, lower self-esteem, and greater incidence of mental and physical health problems among same-sex attracted people. This has prompted the American Psychological Association to support marriage equality. It has also been confirmed by the University of Queensland study mentioned above.

This study found that the more same-sex attracted people felt their relationships were valued in the same ways as opposite-sex relationships, the greater their sense of overall wellbeing.

Because not allowing same-sex couples to marry disadvantages all same-sex attracted people by infringing their fundamental rights, fostering discrimination against them and impairing their physical and psychological health surveys have consistently shown that support for marriage equality among same-sex attracted people, including those who do not wish to marry, is as high as 80%.

7. The benefits to the institution of marriage

The debate on same-sex marriage often focuses on the benefits of equality for same-sex partners, but there are also benefits for marriage as a legal and cultural institution.

Allowing same-sex couples to marry will admit many more couples who seek to uphold the core values of marriage and are enthusiastic for the institution. It will
send out the message that marriage is defined by love and respect not prejudice and discrimination. It will also prompt opposite-sex couples to re-value wedlock as an institution in which the over-arching values are love, devotion, and not least, social inclusion. Allowing same-sex couples to marry will show that marriage is relevant and resilient enough to embrace changing social attitudes in the same way it did last century when married women were given legal equality and interracial marriages were allowed.

Evidence that marriage equality uplifts marriage can be found in those places where the recognition of same-sex relationships has a relatively long history. In Scandinavia the formal recognition of same-sex relationships has been in place for a generation and same-sex marriage is now widely allowed. At the same time, marriage rates among heterosexual couples have increased by as much as 30% and divorce rates have gone down. Similarly, those US states that allow same-sex couples full marriage rights have the lowest rates of divorce among heterosexual partners (the state which has had marriage equality the longest, Massachusetts, has the lowest of all). A review of these examples published in The Wall Street Journal in 2006 agrees none of this is not a coincidence.

“There is no evidence that allowing same-sex couples to marry weakens the institution. If anything, the numbers indicate the opposite”.

8. The benefits for children

The legal and social benefits of marriage flow to the children of marrying couples as well as to the couples themselves.

In Australia today many opposite-sex couples decide to tie the knot to provide their children with the legal security and social recognition that comes with having married parents.

Children being raised by same-sex couples benefit from marriage in similar ways. Indeed, the research cited above shows that they benefit more, because when their parents have the right to marry the prejudice, stigma and discrimination against families headed by same-sex couples is reduced.

It is because of these links that support for marriage equality is highest among same-sex couples with children and is well above the national average among opposite-sex couples with children.

Surveys have shown that about 30% of female same-sex couples, and about 15% of male same-sex couples, are raising children, a figure which rises to almost 50% of female partners over 36 according to a recent national study. In Australia this amounts to many thousands of children who are currently denied the same opportunities as their peers.

Marriage equality is in the best interests of those children being raised by same-sex couples.

9. Enhancing religious freedom

In Australia some religious organisations and officials wish to legally marry same-sex partners in the same way as they legally marry opposite-sex partners. Denominations that seek the religious freedom to legally marry same-sex couples include the Unitarians, Progressive Synagogues, the Metropolitan Community Church and the Quakers.

At its national conference in 2010 the Australian Quakers:

“... agreed to practise full marriage equality within Quaker Meetings around Australia, including celebrating the spiritual aspects of same sex weddings, and expressed their hope that the Marriage Act will be amended as soon as possible to allow Quakers to support such couples to full legal recognition”.

Laws which prohibit same-sex marriages violate the religious freedom of groups like the Quakers by not allowing equal legal recognition of their religious practices.

Melbourne-based evangelical Baptist Pastor and marriage equality supporter, Rev. Nathan Nettleton, puts it this way:

“the doctrine of separation of church and state, for which some of my Baptist forebears endured violent persecution, teaches us firstly that it is a Christian duty to defend the right of others to follow their own conscience before God, free from coercive attempts to impose conformity of belief or practice; and secondly that the state should not privilege the convictions of any particular religious tradition, even a majority tradition, over the convictions of those who dissent from it.”

Allowing same-sex couples to marry will enhance religious freedom in Australia.

10. The benefits to the economy

Allowing same-sex couples to marry would be a financial boon for both the private sector and state governments.

We know from university studies that 54% of same-sex couples would marry if they could. If each of these couples spent about the same amount on their marriage ceremony that other Australians spend on theirs, they would inject at least an extra $700 million dollars into the economy. This amount includes an injection of many millions of dollars into state government revenues through marriage license fees.

There is virtually no offset to this cost, as the same-sex couples who are most likely to marry already have spousal benefits, as de facto or civil union partners, in tax, superannuation and pensions.

11. Growing support within Australia and around the world

As the following list shows, the number of places overseas where same-sex couples are allowed to marry is not only increasing but accelerating:
Support for marriage equality is also increasing in Australia. A 2004 Newspoll found that 38% of Australians supported marriage equality while 44% opposed and 18% were undecided. In 2007 a Galaxy Poll found that 57% of those surveyed support marriage equality. A Galaxy Poll conducted in 2012 showed 64% of those surveyed were in favour of marriage equality, with a clear majority of support among voters for all three parties currently represented in the national parliament. Support was highest among young voters and among parents of young children.

This has grown to 72% in research conducted by one of Australia’s leading research companies, Crosby/Textor, surveying of 1,000 Australi ans regarding their views on marriage equality. The survey showed support for marriage equality is at its highest level ever at 72%. The survey also showed majority support in every demographic, including people of faith, people in regional and rural areas and older people.

In Australia, the number of corporations, unions, community groups, local governments and churches that recognise same-sex marriages is also rapidly increasing. These include Telstra, QANTAS, the Commonwealth Westpac and National Australia Banks, Wesfarmers, Coca-cola Amatil, Microsoft, more than 30 local councils, the Australian Maritime Union and the Quakers.

Even Government agencies are beginning to acknowledge the reality of same-sex marriages; in early 2008 the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirmed it will count same-sex married couples in the next national census.

Among same-sex attracted people, support is also high. The most recent study on this issue, Not So Private Lives, found that 80% of same-sex partners support their right to marry and a majority – 55.4% – would marry if they had the choice.

Clearly, those who declare the Australian people do not support marriage equality, or the gay and lesbian community is divided on the issue, are wrong.

In Australia supporters of marriage equality are increasingly active and come from across the social spectrum. In 2009, a Senate inquiry received 11,000
submissions in support of marriage equality – most of which were from heterosexual Australians.

12. Civil unions are not enough

To address the practical legal problems faced by unmarried same-sex partners, some people advocate civil unions.

(‘Civil union’ is a generic term that includes a registered partnership, a civil partnership, and all other formally-recognised personal union).

However, civil unions do not offer the same legal benefits as marriage, even when the law says they should. This is because they are not as widely understood or respected. Several recent reports into the operation of civil schemes in Europe and North America confirm that civil unions are not always recognised by hospitals, schools, insurers and even government officials.

Lack of recognition is also a problem when civil union partners travel interstate or internationally. But even if a solution can be found to these practical problems, legal unions other than marriage do not give same-sex couples the same social and cultural recognition that comes with marriage. In the words of American marriage equality advocate, Beth Robinson, “nobody writes songs about civil unions”.

Worse, according to the reports mentioned above civil unions may actually encourage discrimination against same-sex partners and downgrade the status of their relationships by entrenching a second-class status.

Civil rights historians like Barbara Cox have drawn the parallel between civil unions and former “Jim Crow” laws in the American south.

“... restricting same-sex couples to civil unions is reminiscent of the racism that relegated African-Americans to separate railroad cars and separate schools. Our society’s experiences with ‘separate and equal’ have shown that separation can never result in equality because the separation is based on a belief that a distance needs to be maintained between those in the privileged position and those placed in the inferior position.”

Civil unions have not only not fulfilled their promise of equal rights and respect for same-sex couples, they appear to have made matters worse. Instead of eliminating discrimination they have entrenched it. Instead of removing stigma they have inflamed it. Instead of being a step towards full equality they are a step away.

This is probably why same-sex couples consistently show they prefer marriage to other forms of legal recognition. In US states where both marriage and civil unions are available to same-sex couples the result is always a higher take-up rate for marriage.

This is consistent with Australian research which shows that only 25.6% of same-sex de facto partners would choose to be in a civil union, and only 17.7% would remain as de facts. Of those currently in a state same-sex civil union 78.3% would prefer to be married under Australian law.

Alternatives to marriage are important for providing legal security and/or formal recognition for those partners who do not wish to marry. In Australia we are lucky to have strong legal protections for cohabiting de facto couples and some of the best state civil union schemes in the world. But there is one piece missing from the jigsaw of legal options available to Australian couples. That piece is marriage for same-sex partners.

REFERENCES


v. For more on health risk in young people see Writing Themselves in Again, the 2nd national report on the sexual health and wellbeing of same-sex attracted young people, Australian Centre for Sex, Health and Society, www.glhv.org. au/files/writing_themselves_in_again.pdf


x. A copy of this poll can be found at www.newspoll.com.au/image_uploads/cgi-lib.17497.1.0601_gay.pdf

IT’S. NOT. MARRIAGE.
ALL RELATIONSHIPS MATTER. BUT NOT ALL RELATIONSHIPS ARE MARRIAGE.

Following is the text for an advertisement produced by the Australian Marriage Forum intended to counter the push for legalising same-sex marriage.

“Marriage … arose in the nature of things to meet a vital need: ensuring that children are conceived by a mother and father committed to raising them in the stable conditions of a lifelong relationship.”


Marriage gives every child a Mum and a Dad. ‘Gay marriage’ makes that impossible. That’s DISCRIMINATION against the child.

IS IT ‘EQUALITY’ IF YOU FORCE SOME KIDS TO MISS OUT ON THEIR DAD?
Heather Barwick
Raised by a loving lesbian couple, March 2015
“A lot of us, a lot of your kids, are hurting. My father’s absence created a huge hole in me, and I ached every day for a dad. Same-sex marriage and parenting withholds either a mother or father from a child while telling him or her that it doesn’t matter. That it’s all the same. But it is not.

Millie Fontana
Raised by a loving lesbian couple, March 2015
“There’s all this talk about equality for women, for gay people, for everybody, but where’s the equality for children when it comes to this? I am in a position to explain to you the kind of damage it does to a child.”

Katy Faust
Raised by a loving lesbian couple, Feb 2015
“Our cultural narrative becomes one that tells children that they have no right to the natural family structure or their biological parents, but that children simply exist for the satisfaction of adult desires.”

Robert Lopez
Raised by a loving lesbian couple, Jan 2015
“I experienced a great deal of sexual confusion. I had an inexplicable compulsion to have sex with older males … and wanted to have sex with older men who were my [missing] father’s age, though at the time I could scarcely understand what I was doing.”

IS IT ‘LOVING’ TO DESTROY THE PRIMAL LOVE BETWEEN MOTHER AND BABY?
We know how much we have hurt children through past Government policies
In 2013 our leaders apologised for the policy that forcibly adopted babies away from their teenage mothers, breaking “the primal and sacred bond between a mother and her baby.”
Now we are being asked to break that primal bond again, by a law instituting “marriage” without a woman, which means families without a mother.

Will we never learn?
A policy for gay “marriage” will overturn state laws that stop two men adopting or creating a baby by surrogacy.
So gay “marriage” means an increase in motherless children.

Which future Prime Minister will have to apologise to the Motherless Generation?
The Hon. Julia Gillard
National Apology for Forced Adoption, March 2013
“The most primal and sacred bond there is: the bond between a mother and her baby.”

Dolce & Gabbana
Gay fashion designers, March 2015
“Life has a natural flow; there are things that cannot be changed. [We are] opposed to the idea of a child growing up with two gay parents.

IS IT TOLERANT TO SILENCE OPPONENTS WITH ‘ANTI-DISCRIMINATION’ LAW?
All around the western world, people who disagree with homosexual “marriage” – teachers and parents, pastors and small family businesses – are being harassed and punished under “anti-discrimination” laws.
Rodney Croome, the head of Australian Marriage Equality, has called for the Catholic Bishops to be taken to the Anti-Discrimination Commission for their Pastoral Letter teaching the Christian understanding of marriage. In response, a Tasmanian Greens candidate is taking Hobart’s Archbishop Julian Porteous to the Anti-Discrimination Commission.

As columnist Angela Shanahan wrote about this, “Since when has teaching your children what you and most of the world’s population believe to be right, been a thought crime?”
Gay people have the right to live as they choose, but no right to silence others who disagree with them on marriage and sexual right and wrong.

“Don’t Mess with Marriage”: a Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops of Australia, June 2015
“People who adhere to the perennial and natural definition of marriage will be characterised as old-fashioned, even bigots, who must answer to the law.”

Rodney Croome
Australian Marriage Equality, June 2015
“I urge everyone who finds [the Catholic booklet] offensive and inappropriate, including teachers, parents and students, to complain to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.”

IS IT RIGHT TO FORCE HOMOSEXUAL EDUCATION ON ALL OUR CHILDREN?
The radicalising of sex education and usurping of parental authority is (in our view) a main objective of the homosexual revolution.
If the Law says homosexual “marriage” is normal and right, schools must teach homosexual sex as explicitly as heterosexual sex.
At present, parents can object to homosexual practices being promoted to our children, as with the current controversial “Safe Schools” program.
But parents would be sidelined – as we have seen overseas – if homosexual “marriage” becomes the law of the land.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia
“OMG I’m Queer”, 2014 edition
p.10 “Doing it”, Safe Schools Coalition
“Penis-in-vagina sex is not the only sex, and certainly not the ultimate sex. I’m bisexual, so I ended up thinking of myself as having two virginities, my first time with a chick and my first time with a dude.”

Robb & Robin Wirthlin
Parents of primary school children, Massachusetts, USA
“After Massachusetts legalised gay marriage, our son came home and told us the school taught him that boys can marry other boys. He’s in second grade! We tried to stop public schools teaching them about gay marriage, but the courts said we had no right to object or pull them out of class.”

IS IT HONEST TO LIE ABOUT WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO TO MARRIAGE?
Serious gay activists do not want to “join” marriage; they want to take it and remake it in their own sexually radical image.
So Michelangelo Signorile urges gays “to fight for same-sex marriage and its benefits and then, once granted, redefine the institution of marriage completely.”
Some (like Masha Gessen want marriage to no longer exist, while others (like Dennis Altman) see no place in gay marriage for “monogamy” or sexual faithfulness.
And some want to press on from “GAY MARRIAGE” to “GROUP MARRIAGE”, with Australian polyamorist Rachelle White saying, “I do think we need to address same-sex marriage before we do move forward and look at polyamorous marriage.”
Chief Justice John Roberts of the US Supreme Court said in his dissenting ruling on same-sex marriage, “It is striking how much of the majority’s reasoning would apply with equal force to the claim of a fundamental right to plural marriage.”
For if “love knows no boundaries”, who are we to deny “marriage equality” to three or four loving and committed people who want their union given society’s approval?
This is a revolution that will leave marriage and
family unrecognisable – and we are being lied to that "nothing will change".

**Masha Gessen**  
Lesbian activist, Sydney Writers’ Festival 2012  
“Fighting for gay marriage generally involves LYING about what we are going to do with marriage when we get there, because we lie that the institution of marriage is not going to change. And that is a lie. The institution of marriage is going to change, and it should change, and again I don’t think it should exist.”

**Dennis Altman**  
Gay activist, Sydney Writers’ Festival 2012  
“I would love to have the people who are out there arguing for same sex marriage say ‘Let’s be clear: marriage is about primary emotional commitment to another person and it doesn’t mean I won’t **** around.’ There are virtually no longstanding monogamous gay relationships. I happen to think that this is a good thing.”

**IS IT EVEN NECESSARY NOW THAT ALL COUPLES HAVE EQUAL BENEFITS?**

Australian law treats all couples the same, whether married or de facto, heterosexual or homosexual.

In 2008, a bipartisan majority of Federal Parliament changed 85 laws to remove any unjust discrimination against same-sex couples across the board – in Medicare, taxation, superannuation, inheritance, next of kin status etc.

Gay couples have full relationship equality now.

The relationship of couples to a child is a different question. In some states same-sex couples do not have the right to adopt or create a child by surrogacy – because the right of the child to have both a mother and father role model outweighs the claim of same-sex adults to obtain a child.

Same-sex “marriage” abolishes either a mother or a father from the life of a child. It denies equality to kids.

**Tanya Plibersek**  
Labor deputy leader, May 2015  
Discrimination is gone  
“We changed 85 laws [in 2008], removed every piece of legal discrimination against gay men, lesbians and same-sex couples on the statute books.”

There is equality without marriage  
All couples have equal status  
A gay couple has the same status and benefits in law as our former First Couple (the Hon. Julia Gillard and Mr Tim Mathieson). And neither couple needs a marriage certificate to achieve this status.

**Same-sex couples (the 1%) are free to live as they choose, but they are NOT free to redefine marriage for the rest of us.**

**FIND. ANOTHER. WORD.**

This is a text only version of a full-page advertisement that appeared in *The Australian* on Monday 10 August 2015.  

The following statistical information on cohabitation in Australia is provided in charts and data tables.

**Cohabitation (also called ‘de facto relationship’)**

A couple living together in a consensual union when not legally married to each other (that is, when not in a registered marriage). The trends outlined here are restricted to heterosexual relationships.

The proportion of all couples who are cohabiting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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has increased across the Census years, from 6% in 1986 to 16% in 2011.

From 1986 to 2011, the proportion of persons aged 15 years and over who were cohabiting has increased progressively from 4% to 10%, while the proportion of the persons who were married has fallen progressively from 58% to 49%. Despite the rise in cohabitation, the proportion of persons aged 15 years and over who were living with a spouse or partner has declined from 62% in 1986 to 59% in 2011. These statistics are based on persons living in private dwellings at each Census.

The proportion of all couples who are cohabiting has increased across the Census years, from 6% in 1986 to 16% in 2011.

The likelihood of being in a cohabiting relation rather than being married varies with age. Cohabitation is most prevalent among young people. Across all four of the most recent census years, the majority of partnered men aged under 25 years were cohabiting while the reverse held for partnered men in older age groups.

The progressive rise in cohabitation between 1996 and 2011 is evident across virtually all the age groups, and is least apparent among the oldest groups. In each of these Census years, at least 96% of all partnered men in the four oldest age groups (70+ years) were married.

For younger age groups, the rise in cohabiting was more marked between 1996 and 2001 and between 2001 and 2006, than between 2006 and 2011.

Consistent with the trends for partnered men, the likelihood of partnered women being in a cohabiting relationship rather than being married varies with age.

**PROPORTION OF PEOPLE AGED 15+ YEARS WHO WERE MARRIED OR COHABITING, 1986-2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Married (%)</th>
<th>Cohabiting (%)</th>
<th>Total partnered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROPORTION OF PARTNERED MEN WHO WERE IN A COHABITING RELATIONSHIP, 1996-2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>1996 (%)</th>
<th>2001 (%)</th>
<th>2006 (%)</th>
<th>2011 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROPORTION OF PARTNERED MEN WHO WERE IN A COHABITING RELATIONSHIP, 1996-2011**

Note: Excludes persons in non-private dwellings, overseas visitors, visitors only, persons in other non-classifiable households, persons who were temporarily absent on Census Night.

Cohabitation is most prevalent among young people. Across all four Census years, the majority of partnered women aged under 25 years were cohabiting with one exception: in 1996, a higher proportion of partnered women aged 20-24 years were married rather than cohabiting (54% vs 46%). The progressive rise in cohabitation between 1996 and 2011 is evident across all the age groups under 80 years old.

However, in each of these Census years, at least 97% of all partnered women in the four oldest age groups (70+ years) were married. For younger age groups, the rise in cohabiting was more marked between 1996 and 2001 and between 2001 and 2006, than between 2006 and 2011.
DEFINITION OF A PARTNER

Department of Human Services explains how partnerships are defined for legal and financial payment eligibility purposes

We need to know if you are single or a member of a couple when considering your eligibility for a payment. Most of our payments take into account the income and assets of both members of a couple.

Some payments have different rates, depending on whether you are single or have a partner and others are only available to customers who do not have a partner.

MEMBER OF A COUPLE

You are a member of a couple if you are living together, or usually live together, and are:

- Married
- In a registered relationship – opposite sex or same sex
- In a de facto relationship – opposite sex or same sex.

If you are a member of a couple we do not usually assess your relationship. If we need to assess, we consider the following factors:

- Finances
- Social relationships
- Nature of your household
- Presence or absence of a sexual relationship
- Nature of the commitment.

We understand not all couples are the same. Some of these factors may not be in your relationship. A decision can still be made that you are a member of a couple even if all of these are not present in your relationship.

If we decide that you are a member of a couple but you believe this will result in unfair hardship, you can ask us to consider if you can be assessed as a single under Section 24 of the Social Security Act 1991 despite being a member of a couple. Each request is assessed on a case by case basis.

REGISTERED RELATIONSHIP

A registered relationship is one that is registered under Australian state or territory laws, including civil partnership schemes.

These are currently recognised in the:

- Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales
- Queensland
- Tasmania
- Victoria

Relationships registered in other countries are not recognised, as they are not approved under Australian state or territory law. However, you can still use this evidence to show you are a couple in a de facto relationship.

DE FACTO

A de facto relationship is where two people who are not married or in a registered relationship, live together as a couple. You are in a de facto relationship from the time you start living together as a couple. There is no minimum time period for a relationship to be seen as de facto.

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How many same-sex couples are there?

The number of same-sex couples in Australia counted in the latest Census has risen significantly in recent years, according to this extract from an ‘Australian Social Trends’ feature article, published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

According to the 2011 Census, there were around 33,700 same-sex couples in Australia, with 17,600 male same-sex couples and 16,100 female same-sex couples. Same-sex couples represented about 1% of all couples in Australia. This pattern of more male than female same-sex couples has been consistent since 1996, when data first became available, although the degree of difference has decreased in each Census.

Although the overwhelming majority of same-sex couples described themselves on the Census form as de facto partners, there were 1,300 same-sex couples where one person was described as the husband or wife of the other.

The number of same-sex couples in Australia counted in the Census has risen significantly in recent years, with a 32% increase in the five years since 2006. In the 15 years between 1996 and 2011, the number of same-sex couples more than tripled.

The increasing number of people identified as being in a same-sex relationship may reflect growing social acceptance. There may also be increased awareness that data about same-sex couples is made available from the Census, giving more reason for same-sex couples to be open about the nature of their relationship and willing to supply this information.

According to the ABS National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, homosexual people are less likely than heterosexual people to be living with a partner: in 2007, 28% of people who reported they were homosexual were living in a couple relationship compared with 58% of people who reported they were heterosexual.
Same-sex couple families with children

Same-sex couple families are less likely to have children than opposite-sex couple families (see below). Less than three per cent of male same-sex couples have children. However, female same-sex couples have around the same number of children on average as those who are not living with a partner (22.2 per cent), including single parents, single people and people living in share houses.

### PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN, AUSTRALIA, 2011

#### OPPOSITE-SEX COUPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### MALE SAME-SEX COUPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FEMALE SAME-SEX COUPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### PEOPLE NOT IN A COUPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With children</th>
<th>No children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from ABS 2011 Census Table Builder.

**Note:**
- ‘People not in a couple’ includes people in one-parent families, group households, single person households, non-private dwellings such as nursing homes, student residences and staff quarters and ‘other’ families and households.
- Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

ARE DE FACTO RELATIONSHIPS MORE UNSTABLE THAN MARRIAGES?

In this report, the ABC News Fact Check team explores assumptions regarding the success and failure of marriage and de facto partnerships.

Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews claims de facto relationships are less stable than marriages. Mr Andrews is currently overseeing the trial of a program that gives counselling vouchers to married and de facto couples, in an attempt to help curb separation rates. ABC Fact Check takes a look at the success and failure of marriage and de facto partnerships.

Marriage and divorce

The Australian Bureau of Statistics collates data on marriage and divorce every calendar year, drawing on information provided by courts and registry offices. The most recent available data is from 2012.

In 2012 there were 123,244 marriages registered across all states and territories. In the same year, there were 49,917 divorces granted. So in 2012, more than twice as many people married as divorced.

A 2007 ABS analysis concluded that 33 per cent of all marriages entered into between 2000 and 2002 would end in divorce. It found that the number of marriages that ended in divorce had increased since the 1980s, with 28 per cent of marriages that occurred between 1985 and 1987 expected to end in divorce.

The 2012 statistics also show that 77.6 per cent of married couples lived together before marriage.

But this data does not allow a comparison of the stability of marriage over de facto relationships, which the ABS does not track.

The claim

Kevin Andrews says the data shows de facto relationships are more likely to break up than marriages.

The verdict

For the majority of couples, a de facto relationship is the pathway to marriage. Still, for those who never marry, the chance of separating is more than six times higher. Mr Andrews’s claim checks out.

The Census

The national Census conducted by the ABS every five years asks about the relationship between people living in the same household.

Lixia Qu, a senior research fellow from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, tells Fact Check a comparison of the Census results for 2006 and 2011 showed that “20 per cent of cohabiting adults in 2006 and 2011 showed that “20 per cent of cohabiting adults in 2006 were single five years later in 2011, compared to seven per cent of married adults in 2006, who were single five years later”.

“The Census data reflected social marital status at the two time points and didn’t capture any change such as re-partnering between 2006 and 2011,” Dr Qu said. “Persons who were recorded as in a de facto relationship or married may not be with the same partner.”

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Marriage and Partnership

Issues in Society | Volume 396
De facto or marriage?

Information more helpful to assessing Mr Andrews’s claim can be found in the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, which began in 2001 and is run by the University of Melbourne and funded by the Federal Government.

The most recent HILDA survey, published in 2012, found that 51.8 per cent of Australians over 15 were married and 10.4 per cent were living in a de facto relationship.

Australian law allows marriages where both parties are at least 18 years old, or where one party is aged between 16 and 18 if approved by a court.

While the report didn’t directly compare the dissolution of marriages and de facto relationships, it did say this about changes in marital status between 2004 and 2009: “The most volatile groups seem to be separated people and those in de facto relationships. However, most of the separated people who had changed marital status after 2004 had proceeded with a divorce, and a large proportion (66.9 per cent) of the 50.2 per cent of de facts who changed status after 2004 got married, 67.2 per cent of them marrying the person they were living with in 2004,” the report says.

“Furthermore, among those who were in de facto relationships in both 2004 and 2009, 65.1 per cent were still living with the same partner.”

So while the de facto couples experienced more change in their relationships, not all of that change was because the relationship ended. Well over half of the changes to de facto relationships were because those people got married – and the majority of those marrying were marrying their previously recorded de facto partner, not someone new.

Interpreting the data

Belinda Hewitt, a senior researcher at the University of Queensland’s Institute for Social Science Research, tells Fact Check that Mr Andrews was probably right about the stability of de facto relationships.

“Overall, cohabiting relationships are more likely to split up, but there are many types of cohabiting relationships and those that proceed to marriage are no more likely to break up than those who marry [without living together first],” Dr Hewitt said.

She said that the detailed HILDA data showed that if de facto couples didn’t get married, they were six times more likely to split up than people who married after cohabiting. They were 7.8 times more likely to split up than people who married without cohabiting, she said.
“Over the 15 years in HILDA only 19.3 per cent of people married without cohabiting. Of those who formed a cohabiting relationship between 1995 and 2010, 63.8 per cent married, 11.07 per cent split up and the rest were still cohabiting at the end of the observation time – 25.2 per cent,” she said.

“Of those who were married 1.42 per cent split up ... and 1.80 per cent of those who married after cohabitation split up.”

The early years

With colleague Professor Janeen Baxter, Dr Hewitt has produced an analysis of relationship breakdown in a chapter for a recent book, *Family Formation in 21st Century Australia*.

Using HILDA data, they looked at relationships formed since 1995, and found that many couples are using cohabitation to determine whether to get married or not.

“It appears that many of the marriages that might once have ended in the first few years of marriage may have been replaced by cohabiting relationships. This has resulted in a lower risk of divorce early in marriage for more recent marriage cohorts than in previous marriage cohorts.

“As in previous generations, Australians continue to form relationships that are relatively unstable in their early years, but in more recent generations those relationships are less likely to be legalised with marriage,” their research found.

**Minimising risk**

Dr Hewitt said she thought that for many people cohabitation is a selection process before getting married.

“The evidence does suggest that overall cohabitators are more likely to split up, but I think that’s because many cohabitations are for convenience or are trial marriages where the relationship doesn’t work out.”

A 2009 study by Dr Qu and colleagues from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Ruth Weston and David de Vaus, found that couples moving from cohabitation to marriage “believe that they have minimised the risks of entering a marriage that is likely to break down”.

The study, based on data collected through HILDA and published in the *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, said: “Despite its increasing prevalence, cohabitation is a relatively unstable living arrangement as evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of couples either marry or separate within the first few years of the union. Indeed, the probability of cohabitation ending in separation rather than marriage has increased.”

**The verdict**

The data shows that de facto relationships are more volatile than marriages. But for the majority of couples, a de facto relationship is the pathway to marriage.

Still, for those who never marry, the chance of separating is more than six times higher. Mr Andrews’s claim that there is “a higher incidence of de facto relationships breaking up” checks out.

**SOURCES**


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A quarter of all Australian households are now lone-person households, according to a demographic trends paper by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

AIFS’ Senior Research Fellow, Professor David de Vaus said that the percentage of one-person households had increased in Australia from 8 per cent in 1946 to 24 per cent in 2011.

“The Australian rate of lone households is similar to that of other English-speaking countries like New Zealand (22 per cent) and the United Kingdom (29 per cent) and falls between the high level found in Sweden and Denmark and the lower rates in parts of Asia, Central and South America,” Professor de Vaus said.

“Many factors underlie the shift including cultural background, age, family breakdown and levels of affluence.

“In some quarters, this trend has been linked to a decline in commitment to family living, increased social fragmentation and a rise in loneliness. For others, living alone has been celebrated as reflecting greater choice.

“Living alone is a little more common among women, than among men, and women who live alone are, on average, substantially older than men who live alone.

“There’s also been a sharp increase in the proportion of those living alone who are aged over 80, up from 9 per cent in 1986 to 15 per cent of those who live alone, a 62 per cent increase.

“This has coincided with an increase in people living alone in their middle years. Now a third of all those on their own are aged between 40-59 years of age.

“In this middle aged group living alone often results from separation and divorce; among younger age groups it is linked with delays in marriage; while among older people, it is more often than not the result of the death of a partner.”

Co-author of the paper, AIFS Senior Research Fellow, Dr Lixia Qu said levels of social advantage and disadvantage were other factors affecting whether people lived alone or with others.

“A consistent picture emerges that shows that younger women who live alone are a socially advantaged group in terms of their education, occupation and incomes,” Dr Qu said.

“They stand out from women who do not live alone and from men in general in the same age groups. In many respects these young women who live alone are well-to-do and have choices.

“They may live alone because their success provides them with more options which means they do not need to partner or their work and career provide more attractions than partnering and having a family.”
The success of these young women may also reflect an educational and occupational ‘mismatch’ between unattached younger men and women.

Given the longstanding pattern for women to ‘marry up’, the shortage of equally or more successful young men may mean that these young women find it more difficult to find a suitable partner who is comfortable with a more successful partner.”

Dr Qu said while living alone was linked to social advantage for younger women, that was not the case for middle-aged men.

“Middle-aged men on their own tend to have relatively low levels of education and are more likely to be in the lowest two income groups, compared to men the same age who live with others.

“While a person’s age and gender can affect the way they perceive living alone, we’re seeing a much more complex demographic shift than simply large numbers of people having failed to develop or sustain relationships.”

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Australian Institute of Family Studies (3 March 2015).
Many Australians live alone (Media release).

Demographics of living alone: key messages

- About a quarter of Australian households are lone-person households, and 12% of Australian adults live alone.
- After steadily increasing in Australia since the Second World War, this growth has stopped since the turn of the 21st century.
- Australian rates of living alone are typical of English-speaking countries, but lower than those in Scandinavia and much of Europe and higher than those in developing countries.
- Women are a little more likely than men to live alone.
- Rates of living alone increase with age.
- The age profile of women living alone is substantially older than that of men living alone.
- The percentage of Australian-born people who live alone falls about midway between the higher rates of those born in various parts of Europe and the United Kingdom and the lower rates of most Asian areas and the Middle East.
- The rates of living alone vary by marital status: about a half of widows live alone, a third of separated people live alone, and fewer than a fifth of the never-marrieds live alone.
- The marital status of people living alone varies by age group: younger people have mainly never married, middle-aged people have either never married or have separated, and older people are mainly widowed.
- Renting is substantially more common among those living alone than those not living alone.
- Women, especially younger women, who live alone are more socially advantaged in terms of education, income, labour force participation and occupation than women who do not live alone and men who live alone.
- Men who live alone, especially middle-aged men, are less well-to-do than men who do not live alone.

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LASTING COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS: RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

This Child Family Community Australia paper by Robyn Parker and Joanne Commerford reviews recent research findings into couples in long-term relationships (married and de facto) that provide insight into the couple relationship over time. This paper addresses aspects of couple relationships such as commitment, personality traits, transitioning to parenthood, health, and relationship satisfaction. The aim of this paper is to inform practitioners and other professionals working with couples in an educative or therapeutic context.

Throughout the 1990s there was an explosion in the volume of research seeking to understand the factors that impacted couple relationships. The identification of risk and protective factors for relationship satisfaction and stability opened up many avenues of research, which continue to be explored.1 Until recently, however, much of the research into lasting relationships came from ‘snapshot’ studies that indicated the range of factors related to stability and satisfaction over relatively short periods. It is reasonable to assume that as time passes and partners and circumstances evolve, the factors contributing to the various aspects of relationships may also change.

The availability of longitudinal data sets stemming from those early studies and the growing interest in long-term relationships has led to an increased motivation on the part of researchers to undertake analyses of participants in long-term relationships. Along with recent developments in analytic methods these shifts in focus are uncovering just how complex committed couple relationships are (Fincham & Beach, 2010). This paper presents a brief overview of recent findings from studies of couples in long-term relationships, with an eye to those aspects that are of value to practitioners working with couples in either an educative or therapeutic context.

RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

A previous paper sought to distil key contributory elements of long-lasting relationships from a number of largely qualitative studies in which spouses were extensively interviewed (Parker, 2002). Few of these types of in-depth qualitative studies exist but a small number of quantitative research projects initiated in the past two decades provide insight into couple relationships over time. Some of these studies respond to the growing interest in lasting relationships and have sought out relevant participants, that is, those in long-term relationships, particularly marriages.

A search of the recent research literature identified ten journal articles since 2004 that reported findings of studies of long-term couples (whether married or de facto). One was omitted due to quality concerns and three others were not directly focused on long-term couple relationships. Two articles reported on data collected across the 1980s and 1990s; although a distant timeframe they were retained because they were directly relevant to the topic. The period covered ranges from 2004 to 2013 with studies involving participants who have been in long-term relationships lasting 11 to 56 years.

KEY MESSAGES

- Recent increases in the availability of longitudinal data, combined with developments in analytical techniques and an upturn in interest in learning from longer-lasting couple relationships, have enabled researchers to gain a deeper understanding into the complexities of couple relationships.
- Factors underlying the complexity of couple relationships as they evolve over extended periods of time are likely to respond to prevention and early intervention strategies targeted at couples in the early stages of their relationships.
- An active engagement in behaviours that are supportive of the relationship is needed to maintain relationship stability – simply wanting the relationship to continue is not enough.
- Similarities between partners, and viewing partners through rose-coloured glasses, appears to support marital satisfaction, although there are some differences in this between men and women.
- Relationship quality has an impact on health in later life therefore investing in the quality of the couple relationship can be of benefit to health promotion and intervention strategies.
- Studies of newlyweds cannot be used to understand couples in longer-term relationships as the salience of some personality characteristics and behaviours appears to alter over time.
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings from the nine studies reviewed for this paper are outlined below. The papers included address a range of aspects of couple relationships, including commitment, personality traits, transition to parenthood, health, and satisfaction and stability.

Commitment

Commitment has been a key focus of relationship research since the 1980s. Recent developments in how commitment is conceptualised have allowed for a more fine-grained understanding of its influence on relationship stability over and above its association with relationship satisfaction. In the past it has been thought that some couples stay together even though they are unhappy because of their loyalty (sentiment and devotion) and allegiance (sense of duty or obligation to their partner or the relationship). Schoebi, Karney and Bradbury (2012) suggested that loyalty and allegiance do not always translate into actual behaviours aimed at maintaining the relationship. Commitment, they hypothesise, can comprise a desire for the relationship to persist (a construct closely related to relationship satisfaction) and an inclination to engage in behaviours that support the relationship.

Partners need to demonstrate a certain level of engagement in supportive behaviours to prevent erosion of the relationship. The key finding in their study is that, regardless of how satisfied the partners are or their desire for the relationship to continue, inclination to engage in relationship-supportive behaviours is a key element in the relationship, with a higher risk of eventual dissolution (measured by the steps taken towards ending the relationship) being found for couples where one partner was less inclined to engage in efforts to maintain the relationship (e.g. making sacrifices, apologising, asking about their partner's feelings, tackling issues). It is also instrumental in how wives, but not husbands, engage in problem-solving interactions, with those wives with greater inclination to engage in supportive behaviours also likely to exhibit more constructive problem-solving methods. In contrast, husbands’ behaviour in problem-solving tasks was associated with their relationship satisfaction, with more constructive behaviours demonstrated by those with greater satisfaction.

These findings are consistent with other recent research indicating that addressing difficult issues in the short term will be beneficial to the couple in the long run, whereas not making the effort to maintain the relationship can guide it closer to the brink of dissolution (see e.g. McNulty, O’Mara, & Karney, 2008).

Personality traits

Relationships research has consistently found that the personality trait of neuroticism has a strong negative impact on relationship satisfaction (e.g. Karney & Bradbury, 1995b). However, it has been pointed out that this association is based on studies of newlywed and dating couples, and there are questions about how well findings can be generalised from newlyweds or those married just a few years to older long-term couples (married or otherwise).

O'Rourke, Claxton, Chou, Smith, and Hadjistavropoulos (2011) examined the question of whether the relationship between personality and marital satisfaction is different among older couples. They considered whether and how the Big Five personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; Costa & McRae, 1992; see Box 1 for a brief description) of 125 older couples was related to their marital satisfaction. Participants rated their own as well as their partner’s personality, with the discrepancies between the partners’ scores also forming part of the analysis. Two articles reported on their findings, which are summarised below.
In contrast to earlier research, Claxton, O’Rourke, Smith and DeLongis (2011) found that the traits other than neuroticism were related to relationship satisfaction. They calculated a value representing the mean of the self- and partner-reports on each trait to test whether and which traits were related to marital satisfaction. Using this *intra-couple trait average* they found that relatively higher levels of conscientiousness were related to higher marital satisfaction for husbands and wives, while relatively higher levels of neuroticism were related to lower satisfaction only for husbands. The authors also calculated a *positive discrepancy* variable based on the difference between the participant’s own ratings and their partner’s ratings of each trait. For all five traits, where the husbands’ ratings of wives traits were more favourable than the wives’ ratings of themselves, husbands were more satisfied. This relationship held for wives’ ratings of their husbands for all traits except openness to experience.

The striking result in this study, however, is the importance of the positivity of the differences between partners’ ratings of themselves and each other. Wives were happier when there was a positive discrepancy between their own and their husbands’ ratings of them on neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, but satisfaction for husbands was related only to a positive discrepancy between their own and their wives’ ratings of husbands’ neuroticism and agreeableness. It would appear that those rose-coloured glasses are indeed good for relationships, at least to some degree – individual partners feel happier when their spouse or partner has a ‘shinier’ view of them than they have of themselves.

In a separate paper (O’Rourke et al., 2011), levels of extraversion were reported as related to both spouses’ marital satisfaction. The benefits of similarity of partners, at least in terms of personality traits, were further supported. Where spousal reports of openness to experience were similar, husbands were likely to be more satisfied in the relationship, and wives were more likely to be happy when there was similarity between their own and the partner’s agreeableness. The positivity bias found by Claxton et al. was not apparent here.

In summary, while research with younger couples is clear on the link between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction, these two papers suggest those findings may not be applicable to older, long-married couples. Notwithstanding the potential influence of cohort effects and self-selection, it may be that over time the behaviours and characteristics of the trait of neuroticism become less salient, and differences on other traits more salient, to the couple. Further longitudinal work is needed to clarify how personality affects couple relationships over the life course.

**Transitioning to parenthood**

A couple’s journey is marked by a number of challenges, not least of which is the birth of their first child. This would suggest that the transition to parenthood would be a critical time in the long-term pathway of couple satisfaction and stability, however it has not attracted a great deal of high quality, long-term research that can shed light on how satisfaction changes through parenthood.

It is accepted that parenthood brings many challenges and satisfaction declines over time for many couples (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Research suggests that couple relationships are more stable when initial relationship satisfaction is higher, at least over a four-year period (Karney & Bradbury, 1995a). There is also general agreement that partners’ relationship satisfaction declines particularly during their child’s teenage years, but this may not impact on the stability of the relationship itself.

Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, and Cowan (2009) attempted to redress some of the gaps in this research by following two cohorts of parents to examine (a) how satisfaction declines over time and (b) the role that attachment security may play in declining satisfaction and/or the breakdown of the relationship. Their design made use of two groups of couples (Cohort 1, n = 81 couples; Cohort 2, n = 96 couples), examining levels of and changes in relationship satisfaction over a 15-year timeframe that included the transition to school of their first child.

Secure attachment to one’s partner/spouse (see Box 2 for a description of attachment styles and their use in research on adult attachment relationships) is consistently found to be associated with greater relationship satisfaction but little of the research in this domain is longitudinal. This leaves questions about the potential buffering effect of attachment security...
**Box 2: Attachment and adult romantic relationships**

Originating in the field of psychoanalysis, attachment theory was formulated to explain patterns of behaviour evident in infants, young children, adolescents and adults. Observations of how infants and young children respond when separated from their primary caregiver were influential in the formulation of the theory (Bowlby, 1988). The phases of anxiety and protest, despair, and detachment, were isolated by Bowlby (1979) as typical responses displayed by infants in order to elicit proximity to their caregiver. Repetition of these interactions leads to the infant developing a pattern of attachment that is based on their expectations of the responsiveness and dependability of the caregiver (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). These patterns of attachment behaviour (or orientations) were identified as secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall in 1978 (Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998; Bowlby, 1988) and are believed to “characterise human beings from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1979, p.129).

Attachment theory has more recently been applied to the study of adult romantic relationships to help better understand how relationships evolve (Hirschberger et al., 2009). Hazan and Shaver (1987, p.511) suggested that romantic love is itself “an attachment process (a process of becoming attached) experienced somewhat differently by different people because of variations in their attachment histories”. Attachment styles have been shown to be “reliably and meaningfully related to many aspects of adult relationships” (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994, p.124), and can be helpful in understanding differences in how adults experience relationships (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Expressed in the context of adult relationships, attachment styles can be considered across two dimensions: “attachment-related anxiety” and “attachment-related avoidance” (Fraley, 2010).

How people are rated on these dimensions (from low avoidance and anxiety to high avoidance and anxiety) places them into four categories, or styles, of attachment:

- **Secure**: characterised by a feeling of worthiness or lovability, and a belief that other people will be generally accepting and responsive
- **Preoccupied**: characterised by a feeling of unworthiness or unlovability that, combined with a positive evaluation of other people, leads to the person striving for self-acceptance through achieving acceptance from others
- **Fearful-Avoidant**: characterised by a feeling of unworthiness or unlovability that, combined with a negative evaluation of other people, leads to the person avoiding close involvement with others in order to protect themselves from anticipated rejection, and
- **Dismissive-Avoidant**: characterised by a feeling of unworthiness that, combined with a negative disposition towards others, leads to the person avoiding close relationships and maintaining their independence to protect themselves from disappointment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

For more information on adult attachment see Fraley 2010: [http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm](http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm)

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or whether satisfaction declines for securely attached partners just as it does for those insecurely attached.

Hirschberger et al. (2009) acknowledged that attachment security may actually be an element of relationship satisfaction, however their research suggested that while there was an overlap, there was sufficient independence to recommend that both attachment security and relationship satisfaction are required when considering the trajectories of relationships. As others have found, Hirschberger et al. demonstrated that not only does a securely attached partner feel satisfied with their relationship, their partner also feels satisfied, relative to other less securely attached individuals. Attachment security does not, however, predict the rate of change in satisfaction, that is, whether the decline is rapid or slow. In this study, relationship satisfaction declined at a consistent rate over time for husbands and wives but only husbands’ satisfaction with the relationship around the time their first child goes to school – in this sample about 8 years into the marriage – predicted whether the relationship would end. It would seem sensible, therefore, to focus some attention on fathers’ satisfaction and wellbeing at this time in order to stem a potential decline in satisfaction.

When their results are considered in the context of previous research, Hirschberger et al. suggest that it is possible that having a more secure attachment orientation may help to cope with the challenges encountered in married life and prevent distress levels reaching a critical point. However, partners who have a relatively secure attachment are not immune from becoming unhappy in their relationship. Further, attachment security can vary over time, hence more longitudinal research is required to enhance understanding of the long-term dynamic associations among attachment, relationship satisfaction and stability.

**Health**

A considerable evidence base has accumulated documenting the relationship between health and marital quality, for example that better health is associated with being in a satisfying marriage (Holt-Lundstad, Birmingham & Jones, 2008). Data spanning several years has showed that as relationship experiences became more negative and less positive over time, self-reported health declined (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Lui, & Needham, 2006). The authors point out that these and other similar findings indicate that the couple relationship impacts health but the findings do not shed light on the question about the effects of changes in physical health on the couple relationship.

Previous research had only been able to test unidirectional relationships but not whether partners’ self-reported health predicted, or was predicted by, marital happiness or marital problems. Findings relating to the impact of health on marital quality have been inconsistent, and there have been no studies of how changes in each may co-occur. Taking a doubly developmental approach (Kurdek, 1998), Proulx and Snyder-Rivas
(2013) suggested that changes in each construct occur in both directions and each influences the other: marital quality can influence both current health and changes in health, and changes in health can prompt changes in the relationship perhaps through changes in roles, power, activities, energy, finances, etc. Developments in statistical techniques allowed Proulx and Snyder-Rivas (2013) to assess the nature of the relationship between health, marital happiness and marital problems, which could be expected to change as the relationship evolves over significant periods.

Drawing on a national sample of continuously married adults who provided data throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Proulx and Snyder-Rivas (2013) analysed data on marital happiness, marital problems and self-rated health from 707 participants (average length of marriage was 33.1 years). Higher marital happiness in earlier waves of the study was associated with better health in later waves, but earlier health was not linked to later marital quality. Nor were changes in marital problems associated with health over time. These latter findings raise a number of questions, some of which may be explained by the limitations of the study such as self-selection (those with significant problems left the sample through separation or divorce), the use of self-report, individual data, or measuring only subjective health (not objectively measuring chronic illness or behaviours such as smoking, for instance). Nonetheless, being able to demonstrate the association between the quality of a relationship and subsequent health using data gathered across an extended period is a significant achievement.

From a practitioner perspective, the findings suggest that aspects of an individual’s relationship could be engaged to support health-related activities or interventions. For instance, through community campaigns promoting the value of strong couple relationships to partners’ health and the support of programs that strengthen couple relationships in the early years as a way of underpinning better health in later life.

**Relationship satisfaction**

The Denver Family Project, conducted through the 1980s and 1990s aimed to determine whether couples who remained satisfied, became distressed, or divorced could be identified by their scores on a range of demographic and interaction factors. By collecting both self-report and observational data at multiple points the researchers tried to address the limitations of other studies that used only self-report and demographic information from one partner over short periods.

Clements, Stanley and Markman (2004) analysed data from couples participating in the project who had been followed for 13 years. Their analysis showed that the way that partners interact at the very beginning of their marriage, that is, the intensity of problems, negative communication patterns and invalidation of emotions, sets the couple up for a gradual erosion of positivity across the life of the relationship. These factors, which could reliably discriminate between couples who were together and happy, were together but distressed, and were divorced, are amenable to educative interventions and thus appropriate targets for practitioners working with couples in either primary or secondary intervention settings.

Although their studies were based on longitudinal data, the age of the data analysed by Proulx and Snyder-Rivas and Clements et al. may give pause to attempts to apply the findings to current relationships. Given the emphasis now on the social and relational context in which relationships unfold (Fincham & Beach, 2010) one may wonder whether the findings can be generalised from couples forming and maintaining relationships across the 1980s and 1990s. However, as the complexities of modern relationships are further revealed through current methods and techniques, the factors contributing to long-lasting relationships identified in earlier research serve as a touchstone for new understandings.

**SUMMARY AND KEY MESSAGES**

There appears to be four key messages to take away from these studies.

The first is that simply wanting a relationship to continue is insufficient – active engagement in behaviours that support the relationship is needed in order to maintain its stability. For women this engagement is reflected in constructive approaches to solving relationship problems, however, for men constructive problem solving is related to being more satisfied with the relationship. Second, partner similarity and viewing partners through rose-coloured glasses appear to underpin marital satisfaction, although in different ways for women and men. Third, the nature of pre- and early-marriage interactions and men’s satisfaction with the relationship across the transition to parenthood can influence the long-term stability of the relationship. Fourth, the quality of the relationship has impacts on
health in later life, so attending to the relationship throughout the life course is an important task, and it can be drawn on as a source of support for health promotion and intervention.

Fortunately the factors identified in these studies are largely dynamic factors amenable to prevention and early intervention activities such as relationship education and skills training. In their various forms, relationship education programs aim to help couples committing to a life together (whether married or de facto) build a strong foundation of awareness and understanding – of themselves and each other, and of the patterns of communication and conflict that will define their relationship in the long term. These programs encourage an intentional view of relationship dynamics and equip couples with knowledge and skills that will help to reinforce that foundation and help support the long-term stability of the relationship, through the transitions and challenges of becoming parents and ageing.

Further, couples in long-term relationships cannot be understood by referring to studies of newlyweds as the salience of some personality characteristics and behaviours appears to change over time as partners adapt to challenges and experiences.

The recent upturn in interest in what can be learned from longitudinal data, and developments in analytical techniques have allowed researchers to reveal more of the complexity of couple relationships as they unfold over extended periods. In large part, the factors underlying that complexity are those that are likely to respond to prevention and early intervention efforts to build stronger relationships in the early stages, suggesting that giving couples the knowledge and resources early in the relationship life course may help them to avoid and/or withstand the stresses that can erode satisfaction and stability in the long term.

Robyn Parker is a Senior Manager, Research and Evaluation at Interrelate Family Centres.

Joanne Commerford is a Research Officer, Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) information exchange at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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REFERENCES


NOTES

1. The terms “relationship satisfaction”, “marital satisfaction”, “couple satisfaction” and “marital happiness” are similar constructs and used interchangeably in this paper, depending on the terminology used in the literature.

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More Australians are divorcing after twenty years or more of marriage, according to the latest data released by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The AIFS’ report Working Out Relationships reveals an increase in the number of couples divorcing after long periods of marriage. AIFS’ Director, Professor Alan Hayes said that the proportion of divorces ending after twenty years had increased from 13 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2011.

“Divorce trends have been heavily influenced by changing social norms about remaining in unhappy marriages. There is far less social stigma today about ending a marriage and women are less reliant on men for their financial stability,” Professor Hayes said.

The proportion of divorces ending after twenty years had increased from 13 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2011.

“The increased proportion of all divorces that entail longer term marriages also suggests that increasing numbers of parents will delay divorce until all of their children are at least 18 years old. It is not surprising that the proportion of divorces involving children under 18 years has declined over the last few decades.”

AIFS’ Senior Research Fellow, Lixia Qu said divorce after fewer than ten years of marriage remained the most common time for separation.

“The increased proportion of all divorces that entail longer term marriages also suggests that increasing numbers of parents will delay divorce until all of their children are at least 18 years old. It is not surprising that the proportion of divorces involving children under 18 years has declined over the last few decades.”

“We are also seeing partnership rates falling among middle-aged people, reflecting both the decline in the marriage rate and the increase in divorce rates for middle age men and women. The fall in partnership rates was particularly evident among men aged in their late 40s to early 60s and for women in their early 40s through to their late 50s.”

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What types of factors contribute to difficulties in relationships?

In the Australian Relationships Indicators Survey conducted by Relationships Australia and CUA in 2008, people were asked to select from a list of factors that could impact upon partner relationships. Their responses are listed below (Please note: as respondents could nominate multiple answers, the total percentage is greater than 100%).

The 2008 survey results show that most people have experienced stress as the main factor to impact on their partner relationships. A cross-analysis of the results suggested that when the other issues listed are present in a relationship, it is highly likely that the individuals involved feel stressed.

This is particularly the case if there are issues with work pressures, job insecurity, loss or unemployment, or violence or abuse. Half of all respondents had experienced different goals or expectations, different perspectives or values, a lack of time to spend together or the problem of work pressures.

A continuing trend is shown across the 2006 and 2008 surveys identifying the three main factors most negatively impacting on relationships – different goals or expectations, different perspectives or values and lack of time to spend together.

The findings of this survey confirm that having difficulties in relationships is normal

Many relationships do survive such difficulties. When trouble strikes in a relationship, it is advisable to get help to support you and your partner through the difficult times.

Related content

Relationships Australia provides a range of support services for individuals, couples and families to help them deal with problems they may be having in their relationships. If you would like to know more about

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<th>Factors impacting on your partner relationship</th>
<th>Response (%)</th>
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<td>Stress</td>
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<td>Different goals and expectations</td>
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<td>Different perspectives or values</td>
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<td>Lack of time to spend together</td>
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<td>Work pressures</td>
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<td>Lack of trust</td>
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<td>Financial insecurity / difficulties</td>
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<td>Serious illness or disability</td>
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<td>Sexual difficulties</td>
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<td>Ageing parents or other caring responsibilities</td>
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<td>Children from a previous relationship</td>
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Relationship Australia’s services, such as counselling, family dispute resolution or family violence prevention, click on the following link: www.relationships.org.au/what-we-do/services

Relationships Australia provides counselling for individuals couples and families; parenting and relationship education; support for families going through separation; workplace counselling and training; employee assistance programs for companies; and training for family support professionals.

Relationships Australia is part of a national network of over 150 centres.
10 WAYS TO BECOME A BETTER PARTNER

Family Relationships Online offers some relationship fact sheet tips

Relationships are at the core of human behaviour. We all relate to other people. However, relating to another is a mixed bag of excitement and fear, anticipation and dread, struggle and elation, closeness and distance, intimacy and loneliness.

Relationships are dynamic and ever-changing. Here are 10 steps you can take to maximise your relationships so that you feel valued, loved and nurtured, and to minimise becoming a relationship casualty:

1. Develop a sense of trust: that is the condition in which you can be seen, heard, understood and accepted.
2. Accept that physical closeness is only one expression of intimacy.
3. Acknowledge each other’s need to be autonomous, to stand on your own two feet and to make your own decisions.
4. Create a safe space with your partner in which you can both express problems, doubts, fears and weaknesses without fear of rejection or punishment.
5. Be willing to communicate, to share what is in your heart and mind and to listen to your partner’s expectations, needs and wants. Listening does not mean having to fix the problem if there is one.
6. Be willing to negotiate around your differences with respect and generosity. You are not going to get your own way all the time.
7. Be aware of and honestly acknowledge the personal issues you bring into the relationship and the unrealistic expectations you may place on your partner.
8. Take time out to be alone and have some space. Without the capacity to be separate you will lack the capacity to give yourself freely to another.
9. Maintain and build supportive networks of friends outside of the relationship. It is not possible for one relationship to meet every need.
10. Develop the capacity to laugh and not take yourself too seriously.

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Better Health Channel offers a number of tips that may help you improve your relationship and be better prepared to meet the challenges along the way.

‘good relationship’ means different things to different people. However, good adult relationships generally involve two people who respect each other, can communicate, and have equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Most of us would also expect our relationship with our partner to include love, intimacy, sexual expression, commitment, compatibility and companionship.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

Tips that may help you improve your relationship and be better prepared to meet the challenges along the way include:

• Talk to each other – just because you love each other doesn’t mean you will be able to communicate well or can read your partner’s mind, or that they can read yours. Communicate your needs – don’t wait for your partner to try to guess what is going on with you.

• If you have something to bring up, do it gently – going on the attack rarely gets you what you want.

• Listen to each other – often we are so busy defending ourselves that we don’t hear what our partner is saying. Let your partner know that you have heard them before you give them your response.

• Remember the positives about your partner – this helps protect your relationship. One critical comment needs five positive comments to counteract its effect. Think carefully before saying what’s on your mind.

• Make repair attempts – if your attempts to talk about an issue don’t go as planned, try not to let the situation become even more negative (such as not talking for extended periods or ignoring the other person’s attempts). Saying sorry or touching your partner in a caring manner shows you care, even though you disagree.

• Spend time together – make your relationship a priority and make time for each other, even if you have to book it in. Regular ‘deposits in your relationship bank account’ will help protect your relationship.

• Work on feeling good about yourself – this will help the way you feel about your relationship.

Summary

A ‘good relationship’ means different things to different people. A major factor in creating a happy, healthy relationship is the willingness of the couple to work at it. Communication, flexibility and spending time together can help build a good relationship.
• **Everyone is different** – accept and value differences in others, including your partner. We often choose people who have qualities and abilities we would like more of. This is one of the reasons why our relationships offer us significant opportunities to grow and develop as people. Remind yourself of this.

• **Make plans** – set goals for your relationship and plan for your future. This shows that you are both in the relationship for the long term.

• **Be supportive** – try not to judge, criticise or blame each other; we are all human. Remind yourself that you are a team, and in order for the team to be successful, you each have to cheer the other on.

• **Learn from arguments** – accept that arguments will happen and try to resolve them with respect. The strongest predictor of divorce is ‘contempt’, which is any action whereby your partner feels ‘put down’ by you, whether it is the tone of your voice or what you say. Often in arguments, we become overwhelmed and this can often lead to behaviours that harm our relationship.

• **Stay calm during disagreements** – or if this is not possible, take time out. Taking an ‘us’ perspective that prioritises the relationship rather than a ‘you’ and ‘me’ perspective can be very useful.

• **Look at your part in the conflict rather than focusing only on your partner’s contribution. Your partner is more likely to acknowledge his or her contribution if you do the same.** Research has shown that relationships fall into difficulty when partners begin to think ‘here we go again’ and this negative cycle is associated with loneliness, hurt and disappointment.

• **Be sexually considerate** – be affectionate (sometimes a lingering kiss or a warm hug are just as important). Accept that individuals have different sex drives and to sustain a healthy and happy sex life requires negotiation. A reduction in a couple’s physical connection is often a warning sign of problems in a relationship.

• **Be attentive** – demonstrate your commitment to the relationship. It is what you do for someone that tells them that you love them. We tend to give our partner what we hope to receive but they may prefer another form of affection. Do they like gifts, quality time with you, a note or a cooked meal? Once you know what they like, make an effort to provide it.

• **Enjoy yourself** – have fun and celebrate your life together. Rituals can enhance your relationship. It’s also important to try new things as a couple. Doing fun activities together is very important, as often ‘deep and meaningfuls’ about couple issues can turn into disagreements which leave you both feeling worse, not better. Fun activities are like glue.

• **Be flexible** – let your relationship grow and adapt as you both change.

• **Share power** – ensure that each of you feels that your opinion counts. Research shows that relationships where the female partner feels that she can influence her partner are the most successful.
SUCCESSFUL LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

In a long-term relationship, it’s easy to assume you know all there is to know about your partner. But people change. Try to be aware of what is happening in your relationship and understand who your partner is and where they are at.

Stay curious about, but respectful of, each other. It is really important to stay up to date about your partner. Friendship is at the basis of all successful long-term relationships. Successful couples tend to be realists who recognise that a relationship will go through ups and downs.

All couples want to have a successful and rewarding relationship, yet it is normal for couples to have ups and downs. To meet these challenges, and to keep your relationship healthy and happy, you need to work at it. Relationships are like bank accounts – if there are fewer deposits than withdrawals, you will run into difficulties.

SEEKING HELP FOR RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

If there is something in your relationship that is difficult or painful to talk about to each other, consider seeing a counsellor. A counsellor can be of great value to help you talk things through, particularly if you are going over old terrain and each of you is feeling isolated, disappointed or hurt by the lack of progress.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors (AARC) Inc. Tel. 1800 806 054
- Relationships Australia Victoria Tel. 1300 364 277
- Family Relationship Advice Line Tel. 1800 050 321 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm, Saturday, 10am to 4pm.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- A good relationship doesn’t just happen – you have to work at it.
- All couples experience problems and challenges in their relationships.
- There are many things you can do to help build healthy and happy relationships and prepare for the challenges along the way.
- Relationships change. You need to be aware of how they are changing and adapt to those changes.
- If problems become too difficult or complex, consider seeking the help of a counsellor.

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WHY WAIT TILL THINGS GO AWRY?

In this article from the Strong Couple Relationships series published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Cathy Dixon describes the benefits of marriage and relationship education programs.

This is the first short article in a series of resources released as part of our focus on strong couple relationships.

The couple sit dejected in the counselling room, feeling hurt and sad. They are both good people; they had started their years together with love, a sense of hope and adventure and every intention of remaining with each other “till death us do part”. They are hurting from years of neglect, feelings of rejection, doubts about their self-worth, and loneliness. They look at photos of their children and remember the confused and lost looks they have seen in their faces over the past months.

What can they do? How can professionals help them?

Picture this same couple, 20 years earlier. They are sitting with confidence and optimism about their future together. They know each other well, they know they are well suited; they have shared lots of adventures and are now ready to commit to a lifetime together.

What if they had accessed professional help in the form of Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) at this stage of their relationship?

How could this contribute to a different picture for this couple?

An MRE program provides all couples with the opportunity to look at the strengths and challenges of their relationship. The very fact that they take part in MRE means that they have the experience of viewing and speaking about their relationship together. This common history makes it more likely that they will bring up issues at some later point.

People who have participated in an MRE program and who rated that experience as being positive (and the vast majority do so), report after the program that they are more likely to access counselling or another form of support when they are troubled in their relationship as a result of attending the program.

MRE develops an understanding that relationships don't just happen; they need to be worked on. There are skills that can be learnt and honed that can contribute to building a healthy relationship.

Some of the skills involve paying attention to the little things that contribute to nourishing the friendship at the base of the relationship. This strong friendship acts as a buffer in times of crisis.

The couples learn strategies that help them navigate the inevitable times of conflict between them. They develop the skills to recognise when they fall into destructive patterns of criticism, contempt, defensiveness or shut down. They learn to have those difficult conversations in ways that in fact can deepen their relationship and protect it from loneliness and hurt. In the words of participants reflecting on their experience 6 months after the program:

"I make sure that I don’t walk away from issues, and that we address things that need to be discussed. I acknowledge my mistakes and try to correct them."

Perhaps this reflection from a previous MRE program participant highlights how valuable this professional help is:

"I realised, possibly the first time, how special our relationship was. I always loved my partner, but had not loved our relationship. The concept of ‘us’ has changed the way I relate to my wife."

Professional intervention at this stage of a relationship can help to prevent the erosion of goodwill and accumulation of hurt that we saw in the despondent couple in the counselling room.

So why wait till things go awry?

NOTES

2. Based on immediate post-program feedback forms and up to 12-month follow up surveys.

Cathy Dixon is Assistant Manager of the Marriage and Relationship Education Unit, CatholicCare Archdiocese of Melbourne.

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STRENGTHENING COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Starting a new relationship, or taking an existing relationship to a new level of commitment, is an exciting time full of romance and adventure, according to this fact sheet from Family and Relationship Services Australia.

As time passes the relationship enters a new phase. The initial excitement and adventure may be replaced by a strengthening bond. Some couples find that at some point in the relationship they begin to take each other for granted, spend less time together or feel they would like more from each other.

We generally don’t expect to succeed in any activity without working at it. Setting goals, learning new skills and getting advice from experts are strategies we use at work, at school, playing sport or developing our interests. A good teacher, coach or mentor can help us achieve our goals faster than we would manage on our own.

It should be the same with our relationships. It takes time to develop trust, understand each other and learn how to communicate effectively. Information and advice from experts or ‘coaches’ can help with understanding what lies ahead or what just happened. Learning new skills in communication, negotiation and resolving conflict can also help you to develop a stronger, more supportive partnership.

WHAT TO DO?

There are many things that couples can do to build stronger relationships. Whether you are starting out or starting over, marrying or moving in, looking for a spiritual or cultural perspective or wanting information free of religious affiliation, you can choose from a range of supports from self-help resources to professional services.

For example:

- Questionnaires help couples understand themselves and each other and identify opinions, attitudes and even family backgrounds that contribute to conflict.
- Self-development programs help couples develop healthy relationship habits, communicate with each other and resolve conflict in many different formats including DVDs, books and workbooks as well as online programs.
- Courses and group programs cover topics including intimacy and sex, strategies for resolving conflict and for dealing with key issues such as...
children and parenting, lifestyle and financial decisions, work pressure, career and gender roles that impact on relationships.

- Couple or individual counselling is conducted in one or more private sessions. A relationship counsellor can provide professional advice and practical strategies for enhancing your relationship and resolving areas of difficulty.

- Pre-marriage education is for those about to get married or move in together. Tailored programs can help you plan for long-term relationship wellbeing, build helpful communication patterns and attitudes to each other.

### WHEN IS BEST?

At the beginning of a relationship or when you are making important decisions – for instance whether to live together, to marry or have children – is a good time to think about:

- What skills you’ll need
- What strengths you have as a couple and how to develop them
- How you will face the challenges that crop up when two people share their lives.

For those that have been together for a long time, it’s never too late to think about what makes relationships work better. Perhaps you have an anniversary coming up or you have been through a rough patch – it could be a good time to set new goals together.

### USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Services Directory at [www.frsa.org.au](http://www.frsa.org.au) provides contact details for relationship services operating in more than 400 locations across Australia, alternatively call the Family Relationships Advice Line on 1800 050 321 (8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat).
- [www.relationships.org.au](http://www.relationships.org.au) has useful relationship advice.
- [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au) has tip sheets for men and fathers seeking to strengthen their family relationships.

MANAGING CONFLICT

Family Relationships Online explains how to improve communication problems and avoid conflict escalating to a destructive point where the other person’s views are not considered.

Conflict can occur when opposing points of view come head to head. Although conflict is a normal part of our relationships and is perfectly healthy if handled well, it sometimes escalates and becomes destructive.

We often feel strong emotions when conflict begins to heat up. For many people, it is hard to keep a clear head while experiencing strong feelings. It’s also much harder to listen to the other person’s point of view. Some people aim to ‘win at all costs’. Others want to retreat and hide, either physically and/or emotionally. It’s normal for people to respond differently to conflict – it often has something to do with the way we are brought up. One common thread, however, is that our communication patterns when dealing with conflict can become destructive.

When conflict escalates to a certain point, it becomes almost impossible to consider the other person’s point of view. This might be the time to bring in a third person, such as a counsellor or family dispute resolution practitioner. You can call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321 or search for a local service that can assist on Family Relationships Online.

When dealing with conflict in your life, it’s important to note the following points:

- Abuse – in any form – is never acceptable. We should never abuse other people, just as we should not accept abuse from other people.
- The responsibility of our own communication lies with us alone. No one ‘makes’ us say or do anything. We have a choice in how we react.
- Restricting another’s options through either physical or emotional control is never acceptable. If this is what you are doing, or if this is being done to you, it might be time to talk to someone about it.
- Physical violence against anyone is destructive and illegal. If violence is a part of the conflict in your life it’s important to seek help immediately.

When conflict escalates to a certain point, it becomes almost impossible to consider the other person’s point of view. This might be the time to bring in a third person, such as a counsellor or family dispute resolution practitioner.

Some questions worth asking yourself about the conflict in your life:

- Do the people involved feel heard or shut out?
- Is the conflict leading to compromise or a ‘win-lose’ situation?
- Is the communication respectful or destructive?
- Are you listening and responding, or just reacting?
- Does this communication have positive or negative results?

Some useful tips for handling conflict:

- Listen to the other person’s point of view and make sure you understand it correctly.
- Respect the other person’s point of view.
- Work out where you can compromise – what is the most important and least important thing to you both in relation to this particular situation.
- Try to keep your communication respectful. Don’t use sarcasm or insults.
- Make ‘I’ statements such as: ‘When you say that, I feel ...’ No one can argue with how you feel.
- If things are heating up, ask for time out. Come back to the discussion at a later time when both of you are calmer.
- If old patterns of communication aren’t working, try new ones.
- Try to communicate through a different medium e.g. letters or email.

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WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

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MULTIPLE CHOICE 56
1. What are the legal requirements for a valid marriage in Australia?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What is a de facto relationship, and how does it differ from a marriage?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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3. What is a civil union, and how does it differ from same-sex marriage?

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4. What is a stepfamily, and how are they formed?

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________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

The four main reasons cited for relationship breakdown are financial stress, communication difficulties, different expectations and values, and lack of trust. 

Consider the statement above. There are many reasons why a relationship could break down. Form into groups of two or more people, and using the space provided below, compile a list of possible difficulties that might occur in a partnership which could lead to relationship breakdown. Also include possible steps that could be taken to address these problems. Discuss your ideas with the class.
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Create a research survey to measure public opinion on same-sex marriage. Your survey should include more than one question and should encourage the interviewee to share their views with you. Make sure you build a statistical picture of your interviewees (e.g. include their age and gender identity). Write a summary report from your research findings and share with the class.
DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

While de facto couples experience more change in their relationships, not all of that change is because the relationship ended. Well over half of the changes to de facto relationships are because those people got married – and the majority of those marrying were marrying their previously recorded de facto partner, not someone new.

_Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey_

Consider the above statement. Do you think people need to get married, or should they just remain in a de facto relationship? Do you think it will affect whether they break up or not? Form into groups of two or more and make a list of points with which to discuss your argument. Consider positives and negatives for both marriage and de facto relationships. Once you have compiled a list, discuss your conclusions with other groups in the class.

MARRIAGE

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DE FACTO

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________________________________________________________
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of this page.

1. In what year was the Marriage Act enacted to regulate the rules for the recognition of marriage in Australia?
   a. 1861
   b. 1904
   c. 1961
   d. 1984
   e. 1991
   f. 2014

2. In what year was the Australian federal Marriage Act amended to prevent same-sex marriage?
   a. 1861
   b. 1904
   c. 1961
   d. 1984
   e. 1991
   f. 2004

3. In 2009, the Australian Government introduced several reforms designed to equalise treatment for same-sex couples and same-sex couple families. How many Commonwealth laws were amended?
   a. None
   b. 5
   c. 8
   d. 15
   e. 58
   f. 85

4. What is the term cohabitation another name for?
   a. Person living alone in a shared household
   b. Married partnership
   c. Civil union
   d. De facto relationship
   e. Registered relationship
   f. Single parent family

5. In July 2015, which Australian states or territories legally recognised ‘registered relationships’?
   a. Australian Capital Territory
   b. New South Wales
   c. Northern Territory
   d. Queensland
   e. South Australia
   f. Tasmania
   g. Victoria
   h. Western Australia

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS
1 = c; 2 = f; 3 = f; 4 = d; 5 = a, b, d, f, g.
There were 121,197 marriages registered and 46,498 divorces granted in Australia in 2014. Over the past 5 years there has been a gradual increase in the median age at separation and divorce (ABS, *Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 2014*). (p.1)

Civil celebrants have overseen the majority of marriages since 1999 and the proportion of marriage ceremonies overseen by a civil celebrant increased again to 74.1% of all marriages in 2014 (*ibid*). (pp. 1.3)

Marriages where both partners were marrying for the first time accounted for 72.5% of all marriage in 2014 (*ibid*). (p.3)

Over the last 20 years, the proportion of divorces granted as result of joint applications for divorce has been increasing (*ibid*). (p.3)

In 2011, 49% of Australians aged 15 and over were in a registered marriage, down from 51% in 2001 (Heard, G, *Australian census: for better or worse, marriage persists*). (p.4)

At the 2011 census, the proportion of those who indicated they were separated, divorced or widowed, as well as those who were married, exceeded 70% at 35-39 years of age, exceeded 90% at 55-59 years, and peaked at 96% among those aged 75-79 years, 80-84 years and 85 years or more (*ibid*). (p.5)

Australians living in any kind of residential partnership has remained steady at 59% over the past decade. Proportions living with a partner are highest at ages 35-39 and 40-44 years (*ibid*). (p.5)

Across all age groups, respondents met their partners principally through friends, at social occasions or at work (Relationships Australia Inc, *Issues and concerns for Australian relationships today, Relationships Indicators Survey 2011*). (p.6)

In Australia, marriage is regulated by the *Marriage Act 1961*, which sets out the process for getting married and the legal requirements of a valid marriage (Commonwealth of Australia, *Happily Ever ... Before and After*). (p.8)

One third of Australian marriages involve at least one person who has been married before (Better Health Channel, *Relationships – second marriages*). (p.11)

From 1 July 2009, changes to social security and family assistance legislation mean that all couples are recognised, regardless the gender of a partner (Department of Social Services, *Recognition of same-sex relationships*). (p.14)

54% of Australian same-sex partners would marry if they had the choice; 80% of Australians in same-sex relationships support marriage equality even if they do not wish to marry (Australian Marriage Equality, *12 Reasons Why Marriage Equality Matters*). (p.16)

A number of researchers have shown there is a direct link between legal bans on same-sex marriage and higher levels of stress and anxiety, lower self-esteem, and greater incidence of mental and physical health problems among same-sex attracted people (*ibid*). (p.17)

Only 25.6% of same-sex de facto partners would choose to be in a civil union, and only 17.7% would remain as de facto. Of those currently in a state same-sex civil union 78.3% would prefer to be married under Australian law (*ibid*). (p.20)

At least 96% of all partnered men in the four oldest age groups (70+ years) were married (AIFS, *Family Facts and Figures: Cohabitation*). (p.25)

According to the 2011 Census, same-sex couples represented about 1% of all couples in Australia (ABS, *Australian Social Trends, July 2013: Same-sex couples*). (p.28)

Less than 3% of male same-sex couples have children. However, female same-sex couples have around the same number of children on average as those who are not living with a partner (22.2%), including single parents, single people and people living in share houses (Cassells R, Toohey M, Keegan M, and Mohanty I, *AMP. NATSEM Income and Wealth Report Issue 34*). (p.29)

In 2012 there were 123,244 marriages registered across all states and territories. In the same year, there were 49,917 divorces granted. So in 2012, more than twice as many people married as divorced (ABC, *Fact check: Are de facto relationships more unstable than marriages?*). (p.30)

A third of all people living on their own are aged between 40-50 years of age (Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Many Australians live alone*). (p.33)

Middle-aged men on their own tend to have relatively low levels of education and are more likely to be in the lowest two income groups, compared to men the same age who live with others (*ibid*). (p.34)

The age profile of women living alone is substantially older than that of men living alone (*ibid*). (p.34)

Women, especially younger women, who live alone are more socially advantaged in terms of education, income, labour force participation and occupation than women who do not live alone and men who live alone (*ibid*). (p.34)

Couple relationships are more stable when initial relationship satisfaction is higher, at least over a 4-year period (Parker, R and Commerford, J, *Lasting couple relationships: Recent research findings*). (p.37)

The proportion of divorces ending after 20 years had increased from 13% in 1990 to 28% in 2011 (Australian Institute of Family Studies, *20-year itch – increase in divorce after long marriages*). (p.40)

Divorce after fewer than 10 years of marriage remains the most common time for separation (*ibid*). (p.41)

Friendship is at the basis of all successful long-term relationships. Successful couples tend to be realists who recognise that a relationship will go through ups and downs (Better Health Channel, *Relationships – tips for success*). (p.46)

Although conflict is a normal part of our relationships and is perfectly healthy if handled well, it sometimes escalates and becomes destructive (Menline Australia, *Managing Conflict*). (p.50)

Restricting another’s options through either physical or emotional control is never acceptable (*ibid*). (p.50)
Blended family
A couple family containing two or more children, of whom at least one is the natural child of both members of the couple, and at least one is the stepchild of either member of the couple.

Civil union
A civil union grants many of the same rights to same-sex couples as people married under the Marriage Act. Currently, only the ACT provides same-sex couples with the right to access a civil union. Under the federal laws, these unions are treated as de facto unions.

Cohabitation
Also called a ‘de facto relationship’. A couple living together in a consensual union when not legally married to each other (that is, when not in a registered marriage).

Couple family
A family based on two persons who are in a registered or de facto marriage and who are usually resident in the same household. A couple family without children may have other relatives, such as ancestors, present. A couple family with children may have adult children and/or other relatives present.

De facto relationship
The relationship between a man and a woman who live together as husband and wife on a genuine domestic basis, although they are not legally married to each other.

Divorce
A divorce or dissolution of marriage is the ending of a marriage, contrasted with an annulment which is a declaration that a marriage is void, though the effects of marriage may be recognised in such unions, such as spousal support, child custody and distribution of property.

Domestic partnerships
Same-sex couples have access to domestic partnership registries in New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland. Same-sex couples do not share that right in South Australia, though such couples are referred to in state legislation as ‘domestic partners’ and may make a written agreement, called a Domestic Partnership Agreement, about their living arrangements so as to be recognised by the state as domestic partners.

Family
Two or more persons, one of whom is aged 15 years and over, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering; and who are usually resident in the same household.

Household
A group of two or more related or unrelated people who usually reside in the same dwelling and who make common provision for food or other essentials for living; or a person living in a dwelling who makes provision for his or her own food and other essentials for living without combining with any other person. Thus a household may consist of: one person; one family; one family and unrelated individual(s); related families with or without unrelated individual(s); unrelated families with or without unrelated individual(s); unrelated individuals.

Intact family
A couple family containing at least one child who is the natural or foster child of both members of the couple, and no child who is the stepchild of either member of the couple.

Lone person
A person who makes provision for his or her food and other essentials for living, without combining with any other person to form part of a multi-person household. He or she may live in a dwelling on their own or share a dwelling with another individual or family.

Marital status
A person’s relationship status in terms of whether he or she has, or has had, a registered marriage with another person.

Marriage
Marriage refers to registered marriages only. Under the Australian Marriage Act 1961 (Commonwealth), a marriage may be celebrated by a minister of religion registered as an authorised celebrant, by a district registrar or by other persons authorised by the Attorney-General. A celebrant must submit an official certificate of the marriage for registration in the state or territory in which the marriage took place within 14 days.

One-parent family
A family consisting of a lone parent with at least one dependent or non-dependent child (regardless of age) who is also usually resident in the household. The family may also include any number of other dependent children, non-dependent children and other related individuals.

Registered relationship
A registered relationship is one that is registered under Australian state or territory laws, including civil partnership schemes.

Same-sex marriage
Also known as gay marriage. Marriage between two persons of the same biological sex or gender identity. Legal recognition for same-sex marriage is also referred to as marriage equality.

Separation
When a married couple remove themselves from personal association. You can only apply for divorce in Australia after having been separated for a period of at least twelve months.

Spouse
A husband or wife.

Step family
A couple family containing one or more children, at least one of whom is the stepchild of either member of the couple and none of whom is the natural or foster child of both members of the couple.
Websites with further information on the topic

Australian Bureau of Statistics  www.abs.gov.au
Australian Family Association  www.family.org.au
Australian Institute of Family Studies  www.aifs.gov.au
Australian Marriage Equality  www.australianmarriageequality.org
Australian Marriage Forum  www.australianmarriage.org
Better Health Channel  www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Child Family Community Australia  www.aifs.gov.au/cfca
Families Australia  www.familiesaustralia.org.au
Family Court of Australia  www.familycourt.gov.au
Family Relationships Online  www.familyrelationships.gov.au
National Council of Single Mothers and their Children  www.ncsmc.org.au
Parenting SA  www.parenting.sa.gov.au
Parentlink  www.parentlink.act.gov.au
Relationships Australia  www.relationships.org.au
Stepfamilies Australia  www.stepfamily.org.au

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THANK YOU
- Better Health Channel
- Relationships Australia
- Family Relationships Online
- Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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