

*Five reasons you need the
"Piece of Paper"*

why living together isn't all it's cracked up to be

Many couples believe living together will give them a test run at marriage. Some consider it a less constricting alternative to tying the knot. Others don't want to be alone.

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"By living together, we can see how we'll get along when we're married." 1
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Heard this one? It's not true. Most couples who "cohabit" (live together outside of marriage) are more like dating partners than they are husband and wife. And, living together often changes the way they feel about marriage (less enthusiastic) and about divorce (more accepting). Married couples rely on each other more and are less likely to walk out.

As it turns out, living together undermines both partners' attitudes toward the one thing that ultimately keeps couples together — commitment. Instead of sticking it out through arguments and tough times, couples who move in often give up and move out.

True commitment, as evidenced by marriage, is much more likely to endure through the tough times.

“But we are committed to each other — that’s why we’re moving in!”

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“But we are committed to each other — that’s why we’re moving in!”

Uh huh. Studies show that living together weakens your views of marriage and commitment. In fact, affairs are twice as common among couples who live together than for married couples.ⁱ And, while marriage itself does increase commitment between cohabiting partners, those couples are still less sexually faithful after marriage than those married couples who did not live together first.ⁱⁱ

Commitment is more than just sharing living space. It is a deep and lasting bond that says “no matter what, I’m sticking with you.” If you truly are committed to each other for the long haul, why wouldn’t you make it “official”? What’s holding you or your partner back?

Those who are really committed are willing to show it by going for that piece of paper.



“We’ll be less likely to end up in divorce court.”

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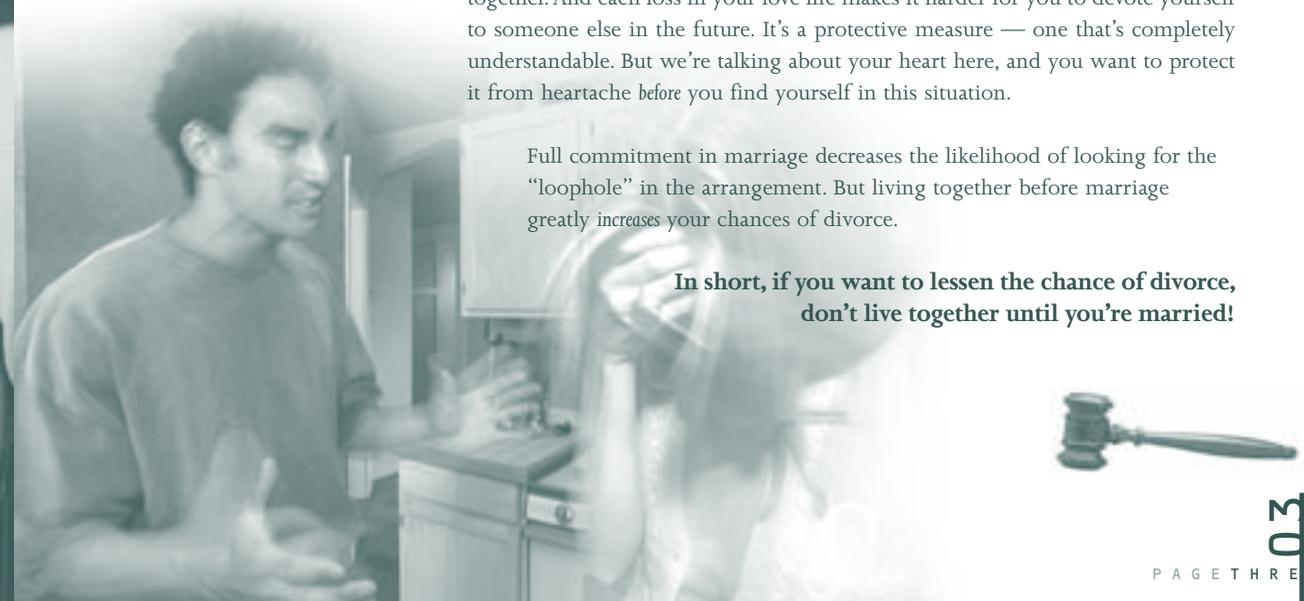
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This is true, but only if you consider the fact that 67 percent of live-ins never even get married!ⁱⁱⁱ For those who do get married, they have an almost 50 percent higher rate of divorce than married couples who do not live together first.^{iv} If you really want your relationship to last, why increase your risks that it won’t?

Breaking up is painful — even more so when you have been married or have lived together. And each loss in your love life makes it harder for you to devote yourself to someone else in the future. It’s a protective measure — one that’s completely understandable. But we’re talking about your heart here, and you want to protect it from heartache before you find yourself in this situation.

Full commitment in marriage decreases the likelihood of looking for the “loophole” in the arrangement. But living together before marriage greatly increases your chances of divorce.

In short, if you want to lessen the chance of divorce, don’t live together until you’re married!



“But we’ll be happier. And we won’t feel tied down.”

“But we’ll be happier. And we won’t feel tied down.”

While it is true that some married couples don’t live in bliss, it’s also true that couples who live together are, on average, far less happy than married couples.^v In fact, studies even show that married couples have fewer disagreements than couples who live together.^{vi}

Studies also show that, overall, marriage relationships are far more fulfilling — sexually and otherwise — than those between live-ins. Despite what you hear on TV, married couples are the most physically and emotionally satisfied with their sex lives.^{vii}

Another problem: Physical and sexual abuse is higher in cohabiting relationships than in married relationships. Couples who live together display aggression at rates twice as high as married couples.^{viii} In fact, married couples have the lowest rates of domestic violence, while cohabiting couples have the highest, even higher than those who are divorced or separated.^{ix}

The marriage commitment results in a more complete and unreserved giving of oneself by both partners. Marriage offers better sexual and emotional fulfillment.



children will be better off.”

“Our children will be better off.”

On the contrary, couples who live together are more likely to leave each other than those who marry, leaving kids smack in the middle of the break-up. Fully three-quarters of children born to live-in couples will see their parents split up before they reach age 16, compared to only one-third of children born to married parents.^x

Did you know that kids who live with their cohabiting parents are far more likely to be abused than those whose parents are married to each other?^{xi} Or that, when it comes to finances, children whose parents cohabit are three times more likely to live in poverty than children of married couples? At best, many kids in these situations end up with behavioral problems, social difficulties and low academic achievement.^{xii} All in all, these are not ideal conditions for raising happy, healthy children.

The safest place for children is in a home where their parents are married to each other. When it comes right down to it, you really do want the piece of paper. It gives you and your future spouse the best chance at a great relationship and the best chance that you will be there for your children.

“Should We Live Together?”

A Few Additional Facts

Excerpted from “Should We Live Together?”

David Popenoe and Barbara Defoe Whitehead.
National Marriage Project, 1999.

- ➔ Cohabitation increases young people’s acceptance of divorce. The longer people live together, the less enthusiastic they become toward marriage.
- ➔ Cohabiting couples report lower levels of happiness, lower levels of sexual faithfulness and sexual satisfaction and poorer relationships with their parents than married couples.
- ➔ Unmarried individuals who live together are three times more likely to be depressed than married persons.
- ➔ Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely than married women to suffer physical and sexual abuse.
- ➔ Couples who live together are poorer than married couples. From an economic standpoint, they are more like single parents than like married couples.
- ➔ Married couples have substantial benefits over the unmarried in terms of work productivity, physical and mental health, general happiness and long life.

- i Judith Treas and Deirdre Geisen, “Sexual Infidelity Among Married and Cohabiting Americans,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (February 2000): 48-60.
- ii Renata Forste and Koray Tanfer, “Sexual Exclusivity Among Dating, Cohabiting and Married Women,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 33-47.
- iii Smock, P.J., & Gupta, S. (2002). Cohabitation in Contemporary North America. In A. Booth & A.C. Crouter (Eds.), *Just Living Together: Implications of Cohabitation on Families, Children, and Social Policy* (pp. 53-84). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum
- iv Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the United States. Data from the National Survey of Family Growth, Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control, 2002.
- v Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, “Marital Status and Happiness: a 17-Nation Study,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 527-536.
- vi Jan E. Stets, “The Link Between Past and Present Intimate Relationships,” *Journal of Family Issues* 14 (1993), p. 251.
- vii Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon and Edward O. Laumann. *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*. Little, Brown & Company, Boston: 1994.
- viii Jan E. Stets, “Cohabitation and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680.
- ix Albert R. Roberts, “Psychosocial Characteristics of Batterers: A Study of 234 Men Charged with Domestic Violence Offenses,” *Journal of Family Violence* 2 (1987): 81-93.
- x David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Should We Live Together?” The National Marriage Project: January 1999.
- xi *Ibid.*
- xii *Ibid.*





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