

conclude that marriage is too risky or difficult. In their attempt to avoid what they perceive as the pain associated with marriage and a marriage dream deferred they have chosen not to dream or not to encourage others to dream or to marry.

Yet because marriage is such a foundational and important institution for our children, families, and community's well-being, restoring the marriage dream and making certain it is not a dream that is lost is a must. It is a challenge we must take on for our children, aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, and ourselves. More healthy marriages will serve as an inspiration for American families, and they will revitalize the hope of marriage.

As we articulate a clear vision of healthy marriages, more couples will embrace and achieve this ideal. After all, the first step to achieving anything in life is to be clear about what is being sought. So we ask, What is a healthy marriage after all? What does it look like? How does it feel? How does it work? How does it behave?

This brochure provides a clear vision and definition of the healthy marriage ideal and elements that serve as a guideline for couples to measure the degree to which their marriage relationship approaches that ideal. Keep in mind as you read and reflect upon this definition that developing a healthy marriage is a continual process and, like perfection, is not intended to be absolute. It requires effort, a positive attitude, and realistic expectations.



NCAAMP
The National Center on
African American
Marriages and Parenting



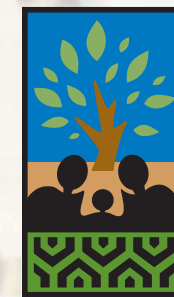
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NOTE: This is the first in a series of informational brochures to be provided by the National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting at Hampton University. For additional copies contact: NCAAMP at 757-728-4912 or NCAAMP@hamptonu.edu.

What is a Healthy Marriage?

*If you can conceive it,
you can achieve it!*



Most Americans want to marry some day, and of course, want to have a truly loving and lasting marriage — what some call a healthy marriage.

Many in their most intimate, honest, and thoughtful moments acknowledge their desire for marriage as a deep yearning for a lifelong partner to share their life with, to grow and grow old with. Have you ever noticed how peoples' eyes and essence light up when they say, "I am getting married"? Or how men will make reference to their wife and women to their husband with such pride and confidence as if to say, "I have this special person in my life who I am also special to"? Some fortunate people are able to observe or even sustain marriages that are good and healthy. However, too many never experience this deeply desired ideal. Far too many have no models for and, therefore, vision of a healthy marriage or know what it takes to attain and sustain their heart's desire for this loving and lasting intimate relationship.

Countless people have experienced or witnessed painful marital failures and hear only negative messages about the experience of marriage in their communities, the media, and other public arenas. This has led many to

10 Key Elements of a Healthy Marriage



1 Relationship Satisfaction

This is the **JOY** of the relationship.

Relationship satisfaction simply refers to couples' mutual and overall satisfaction with their relationship. It is the sense or belief that the marriage/relationship adds to one's personal satisfaction, happiness, and joy in life. This does not mean that the relationship is challenge-free or problem-free but is the feeling that, overall, the relationship adds to, rather than subtracts from, the joy, happiness, and satisfaction in one's life.

2 Commitment to Marriage

This is the **GLUE** of the relationship.

Spouses who are committed to their marriage have a long-term perspective or view for the relationship and a willingness to make sacrifices. They are also able to compromise and change their behaviors for the long-term good of the relationship. These spouses have made a decision to stay in the marriage, in sickness and in health, and trust that their partner will stay as well.

3 Friendship and Spending Time Together

This is the **FOUNDATION** of the relationship.

It is upon the rock of friendship that couples build a healthy marriage. Spouses who are friends are accepting and respectful of one another and do not try to control or change each other. These friendship spouses genuinely like one another and enjoy spending time together. They have shared



interests, values, visions and goals. These couples also share power, decisions, responsibilities and tasks in the relationship. The time spent together is mutually sufficient and acceptable for each spouse.

4 Intimacy

This is the **HEART** of the relationship.

Real spousal intimacy is physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual closeness that is mutually satisfying. It's the place where two souls meet. It means that spouses are collectively expressing and experiencing the love, care and affection of one another. There is a feeling of genuine warmth, closeness and connection between them.

5 Trust and Honesty

These are the **CORE** of the relationship.

Husbands and wives who trust each other believe that their spouse is honest and can be trusted. They feel that their partner is treating them fairly and justly. They know that their partner is dependable and that they can count on each other to be there as promised and to help when needed. Spouses who are honest, share information that is truthful and do not withhold information that is essential for a healthy relationship. They keep it real, are authentic, and do not pretend to know something that they do not know or to be someone who they are not.

6 Fidelity

This is the **PROMISE** of the relationship.

Spouses are faithful when they do not cross sexual or emotional boundaries with others outside the marriage. Sexual fidelity refers to having exclusive sexual relations with one's spouse. However, many fail to recognize that they can also be emotionally unfaithful. Emotional infidelity has three components:

1) emotional intimacy, 2) secrecy, and 3) sexual chemistry with someone outside the marriage.

Emotional intimacy is a deep and passionate connection with another person and may include confiding in that person information that is not shared with the spouse. Secrecy involves withholding from a spouse aspects of a relationship with another outside the marriage that may jeopardize the relationship with the spouse. Sexual chemistry is having a sexual attraction to another person.

7 Supportiveness

This is the **CAREGIVING** of the relationship.

Supportiveness is the helping hand and heart that each partner offers the other as they live, learn life's lessons, and continue to grow. When spouses are supportive of one another, they encourage and assist each other in countless ways. Each believes their spouse is both aware of and supportive of his/her goals and aspirations in life. Supportive spouses also help each other with various tasks, problems, and challenges; and they take pride in each other's accomplishments.

8 Effective Communication

This is the **CONNECTOR** of the relationship.

Effective communication connects the individual and shared thoughts, feelings, experiences, dreams, and challenges of partners in relationship through verbal and nonverbal messages. Communication is effective when interactions between spouses are open, honest and conscious and when what spouses express, both verbally and nonverbally, is in line with what they truly think and feel. It also requires that spouses truly listen to one another and feel that they are heard, understood, and respected by each other. Effective communication requires that each spouse have good intentions. For example, good

intentions in communication are expressed when one intends to understand, connect, encourage, empower, or explain. Bad intentions in communication are expressed when one intends to control, manipulate, win an argument, or insult.

9 Effective Conflict Management

This is the **PROTECTOR** of the relationship.

Conflict in intimate relationships is inevitable and can be healthy. Yet, it must be managed well if that relationship is to thrive. Conflict is managed well when there is an overall tendency to resolve conflicts and solve problems in a way that is mutually respectful and satisfying for both spouses. If conflict is not effectively managed, the relationship will decay and decompose over time as the filth of unresolved conflict continues to mount.

10 Nonviolent Interactions

This is the required minimal level of **PEACE** in a relationship. There is **NO Domestic Violence** in a healthy marriage.

In marriage, both the husband and the wife can be a perpetrator of violence and abuse. When either spouse is violent toward the other, the marriage is not healthy. Violence and abuse can be physical, such as hitting; psychological, such as calling a partner dumb or ugly; or sexual, such as forcing non-consensual sex. The violence can vary in severity from grabbing to homicide.



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