

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

February 2019

Marriage is not about possessions. It's not about who brought what mug into the household. It's about a shared life and a commitment to live life together. But, why is my coffee mug in the sink, dirty, when I want it?

It's hard to live in a society that puts so much emphasis on possessions and then try to become part of a relationship that's based on sharing. As a married couple we hold everything in common, or at least that's the theory. But our history is just ours – you don't share my past, the family I grew up in, my identity with special places or events. I can't take credit for your accomplishments or experience your losses.

Separate Pasts

We are separate people who have worked hard to establish our own independence, and we will continue to have our own identities even as we forge a life together. The challenge is to balance our separate identities with our common life – to have parts that are yours, parts that are mine, and a whole host of things that are ours.

A Challenge

This is a greater challenge for some of us than others. If it was a challenge for me to build my own identity, or buy my own car, then it may be harder to give up that sense of ownership. Many couples now have spent a significant part of their life as single adults and now find themselves struggling to create a common life, even though they love their partner.

Desire to Change

Even though this may be a challenge, it is likely that you really want to change, and



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to be open to sharing with your partner, not only your things, but your memories, hopes and dreams, relatives and friends. You opted for this common life and you want to be all in, and for it to work in the best way possible for you both. You wouldn't have married if you didn't.

Kids

It's possible one of you brought a child or children into the marriage. That requires a different and more delicate kind of negotiation. There is an article in this issue on stepfamilies for those who find themselves in this situation. While it can be tricky, it also can enrich the life of both adult and child. A stepparent can be another trusted adult in a child's life, and a stepchild can be to link to the future you never thought you would have.

You are in it together

Whether you find building a common life hard or easy, it is a task you both have to tackle. The life you share going forward will be the one you both decide to create. Enjoy the project! ■

The Last Rabbit

While you might think that creating a combined life is just something that happens at the beginning of a marriage, it's not really the case. If you have been married for a while, it's very likely that there are things that are more one person's territory or the other's. The TV for instance – who watches it more? Does that make it feel like it's not equally shared?

Pets

In our life, pets are something that have definitely been more the wife's (me) and less the husband's. He did not grow up with pets he explains, and he has been very good about accommodating to a dog. However, when we got a rabbit for the third time, he drew the line. But see, we had this empty hutch from the last rabbit, and I was sure he'd said he wouldn't mind having another one.

Either I misremembered or he had amnesia, because when he came home and saw the rabbit he was not pleased. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that he'd been responsible for feeding the



rabbits, and that meant trudging through the snow and ice for all the months that make up a Maine winter. So I fed the rabbit, except when I could lean on one of the kids to do it, and unfortunately it was the least pleasant of the rabbits who had shared our lives.

Time

So adopting the rabbit ended up meaning I had an additional task, which brings up another aspect of our shared life – time.

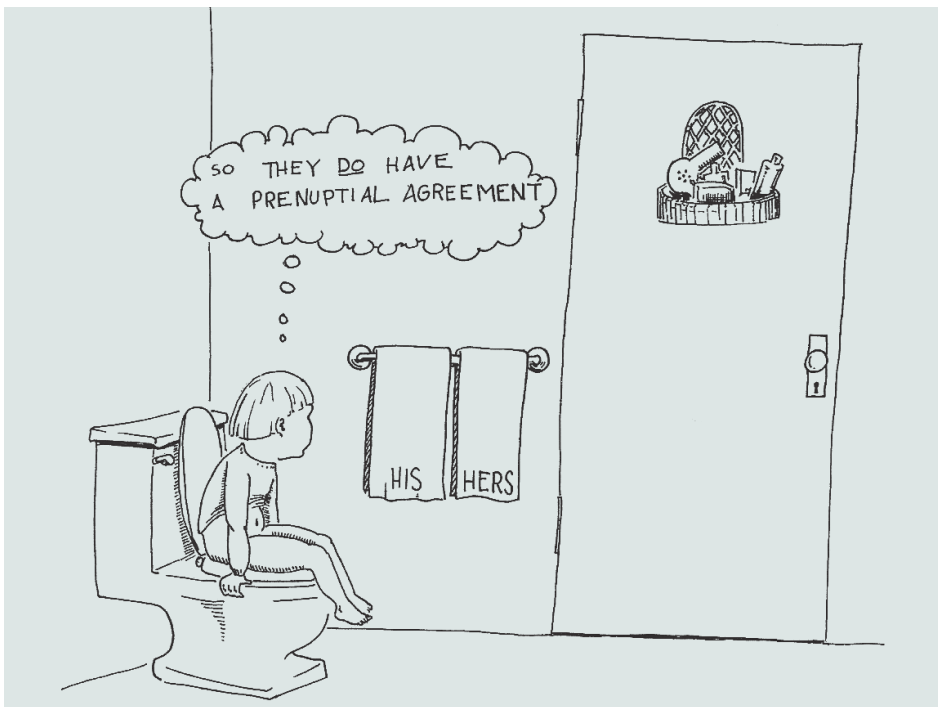
Is time community property, or does your time belong to you unless otherwise designated? Is it okay for one person to watch ALL the football games that are broadcast? Or should there be some Hallmark movie time allotted?

The Marriage "Box"

It's complicated and challenging. Harville Hendrix, the author of *Getting the Love You Want: a Guide for Couples*, says, "In today's society, you are encouraged to view marriage as a box. First you choose a mate, then you climb into a box."

But marriage isn't a box. It's a living reality that grows and changes according to the way you grow and change. And you don't deal with an issue and be done with it once and for all. You renegotiate over the course of your lives and each time add a nuance onto the understanding you had before. And it's worth it, it truly is!

By Kathy Beirne ■



Exercise

What have I brought into our marriage and how does my spouse feel about it?

Check all that apply and then have a conversation about any that raise concerns.

HIS

From My Family

- Possessions
- Beliefs
- Attitudes
- Traditions
- Other

From My Life As A Single Person

- Possessions
- Friendships
- Educational experiences
- Work experiences
- Other

From Previous Relationships

- Hopes
- Concerns
- Assumptions
- Habits
- Children
- Other

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Stepfamilies



One of the most important and challenging “Yours, Mine and Ours” adjustments that you may have to deal with in your marriage occurs if either (or both) of you brings children into the new marriage. Becoming a stepfamily creates unique situations, but there is no doubt that a stepfamily can be a happy, healthy environment for raising children. It does take attention and patience on the part of the adults, though. The following are some tips for living in a stepfamily:

1. Believe that your stepfamily is a good family. It may feel different from the family you grew up in, but it has its own strengths.
2. Allow relationships to develop slowly. Don't rush or push. On average, it takes a child as long to accept a stepparent as the age of the child when the stepfamily is formed. So if the child was two when you got married, it will take about two years before the child really accept your place in the family.
3. Recognize that relationships will change. Your relationship with your child will be different once you remarry, and that may feel uncomfortable for a while, but it's natural and will come in time to

feel better. Be clear about your role, and your new spouse's role. For the most part, it's best to allow the biological parent to set and enforce rules. As stepparent, you can best help your spouse by supporting them in their parenting role, not by taking it over, especially in the beginning.

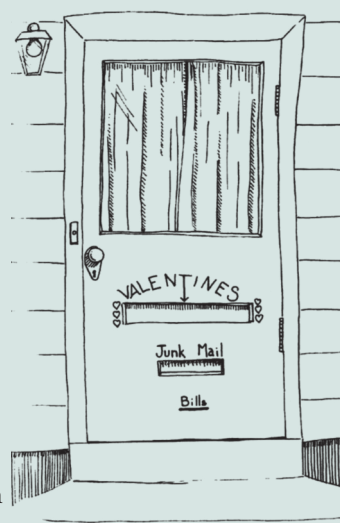
4. There are varied responses to stepparents, based on many things, custody arrangements being one. [This article](#) describes six patterns of step-relationship development.
5. Develop new traditions in your new family, while also carrying some traditions over from your previous family. If there have been some things that your child really looked forward to than try to keep them part of your routine.
6. Allow your child to express feelings, even negative ones. They are losing their former life and some grief and loss is natural. Help them to move on by acknowledging their sadness.

For further information on stepfamilies, check out these sites:

www.misterrogers.org
www.stepfamilies.info
[When you're not the Brady Bunch](#)

Living Joyfully and Living Simply

Marie Kondo's book, *The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up* was a huge hit a few years ago, and now is back in the news as it becomes a Netflix offering. Her suggestion for us is that we should look at the things in our house, from each



pair of shoes to strainer to shampoo, and decide whether or not they bring us joy.

As we approach the setup of our household, it's as good a measure as any to begin thinking about combining what we have, and determining what we will keep. As long as there is enough room in our house or apartment for the things that bring each of us joy, then no reason not to keep them.

Another approach is that of author Susan Vogt, whose book *Blessed by Less* suggests that cutting down on our possessions is a way of following the gospel. In addition to reducing clutter and simplifying our lives, Susan indicates that it is socially responsible to pass along things we no longer need to those that might be able to use them.

And it is true that extra stuff does weigh on us. Couples entering second marriages often have trouble combining their households because of years of accumulation of belongings – and sometimes things that belong to their children as well.

If decluttering is a challenge for you, [these](#) resources may help. You can also check out the following articles:

www.washingtonpost.com
www.ifstudies.org

Spirituality

Have you ever been driving when snow started pelting down, and before you knew it you were in a white out? And there was no breakdown lane so you couldn't pull over?

Those times are so frightening! There is nothing to do but keep crawling along, hoping no one will hit you from the back, or that you will be able to stop if you come upon someone ahead.

Going Forward on Faith

That kind of situation is similar to those times in life when we're required to go forward on faith, not being able to see the path ahead. For us, taking a job in an unfamiliar part of the country was one such decision. Lending money that we could

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barely afford with no assurance we'd get it back was another. Even eating an unfamiliar food can be a leap of faith. While in a way it becomes easier when nothing disastrous

happened the time before, each situation calls on our ability to move forward even when we can't see what's ahead.

Marrying

For many people, the decision to marry is one of those leaps. Will our relationship be the same after we take this step? If you have had a previous marriage or relationship that failed, then it may be even harder to trust that this time will be different.

Having a baby

Deciding to have a child is another of those moments. It involves so many unknowns. Will the child be healthy, and if not, will we be able to handle it? Will we be good parents? Will our relationship suffer because of the new responsibility of parenting?



But not ever taking a risk is no way to go through life, is it? Can you think of a risk you have taken that paid off? Back to driving through the snowstorm, stopping in the middle of the road is not a particularly safe way to handle the danger.

Parable of the talents

Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the three servants who were entrusted with money while the master was away? The two that took the risk of investing and growing the money were rewarded, while the one who buried the money to keep it safe was punished. We are given faith to use it and to let it give us courage for the unknown. Your marriage can be enriched if you are open to letting faith guide you. ■

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