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Marriage Transformation® dynamically empowers individuals and couples to engage in skillful, character-based communications and actions that contribute to excellent relationships and happy, unified marriages and families that serve others.
Couples are like two wings of a bird – both must be strong partners with equal voices for them to soar!

Relationship, Marriage, Parenting, and Family Education in the Bahá'í Faith Community

Potential Ideas and Actions to Consider from Marriage Transformation®

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[Note: Copies can be made of this document for community use. The document is also downloadable from www.bahaimarriage.net.]

About This Document

This document invites Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities, along with their friends, family members, and community betterment collaborators, to reflect, consult, and participate as appropriate, needed, and timely in relationship, marriage, and family education. This education aims to empower everyone who wishes to participate to build happy, unified, and eternal character-based marriages and families. It is both preventive and remedial.

This document reflects Susanne M. Alexander's current understanding, developed through consultation and collaboration with many Bahá'í colleagues. She draws on her decades of experience in the Bahá'í community and from over 21 years as a relationship and marriage educator and coach with her company, Marriage Transformation. This is not an institutionally sponsored document; it's simply offered as an individual initiative educational resource for Bahá'ís to consider as they strive to strengthen the institution of marriage and unify families in their lives and communities.

Any questions about the application of marriage laws in the community should be directed to the Bahá'í institutions:

“... [T]he provision of guidance on administrative matters such as the laws of engagement, marriage, and divorce falls under the purview of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies....” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, September 24, 2014)

Any questions about the link between marriage and family and the activities of the institute process should be directed to agencies coordinating those activities (see more about this further below).

Reconceptualizing Marriage and Family

In August 2023, the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice published a compilation titled “To Set the World in Order: Building and Preserving Strong Marriages”. On March 19, 2025, the Universal House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'ís of the world a letter about family life and marriage. These two documents are

essential for shaping attitudes and actions related to the institution of marriage and the institution of the family. Only brief quotations are included here; please refer to the full documents at: <https://www.bahai.org/library/>.

The letter introduces us to two key lines of action:

1. “The family unit is the basic building block of community, and beyond, of the entire social order. Therefore, a society fashioned to meet the requirements of the age of the maturity of the human race requires both a mature conception of family and an ability to extend the insights derived from that conception to the relationships that shape the nation and the world.”
2. “A new conception of family begins with a new conception of marriage. Bahá’u’lláh observes that marriage is not only ‘the key to the perpetuation of life for the peoples of the world’, but ‘the inscrutable instrument for the fulfilment of their destiny.’” [inserted quotations are from “To Set the World in Order”, #1]

When we use the phrase “a new conception,” it can refer to how people mentally develop or understand something, such as ideas, abstractions, or beliefs that form in our minds. The word “conception” often indicates the creation or origin of an idea—a framework, definition, or theoretical structure. Creating new conceptions of marriage and family will likely be an endeavor that goes on globally for decades to come. These two documents, however, contain a wealth of possibilities.

Challenges and Opportunities in Creating “New”

The word “new” can elicit a variety of responses from us. It can be associated with “change,” which some find energizing while others resist. For “new” to occur, it requires us to practice the virtue of creativity, followed by the virtues of purposefulness and perseverance, to realize it. We must apply the community-building practices of study, consultation, action, and reflection.

The Family Life-Marriage letter of March 19th includes 12 occurrences of the word “new”:

1. “new patterns of family life suited to the needs of a new age”
2. “new pattern of life within and among families”
3. “new virtues and powers” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)
4. “new moral standards” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)
5. “new capacities” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)
6. “new conception of family”
7. “new conception of marriage”
8. “new relationships among other people”
9. “new pattern of Bahá’í married life”
10. “new understanding of equality and its practical expression”
11. “carry the work of the Faith to new places”

(Excerpts from the Family Life-Marriage Letter, Universal House of Justice, March 19, 2025)

We live in a global society where marriage is often disrespected and devalued, and the definition of family is broadening. Cohabitation has become common, even among Bahá’ís, despite research that issues strong warnings. However, in restoring respect for these two institutions, we are seemingly being called to view them through a “new” lens and to embrace new learning and growth.

When marriage is the primary focus of relationship and marriage education efforts, it has often relied on the current societal view of the institution, which has roots in various religions and has incorporated advances in scientific observations. However, these scientific observations are usually based on couples who follow the current model of marriage. This has led to conclusions such as conflict being a normal part of marriage, without

recognizing the importance of consultation and the equality of women and men, which are key elements of the new understanding of marriage based on the Bahá'í teachings.

When those of us in this educational field ask people about marriage, they often mention that they've observed their parents, friends, or themselves struggling with divorce, conflict, or abuse, which leads them to question its value. They often feel they can manage without it and find cohabiting easier to leave if problems occur, whether or not they have had children in this situation.

Maybe we can serve people better by inviting them into the creative process of developing a new understanding (conception) of marriage and living it through a continuous learning approach. The Bahá'í guidance, backed by extensive research on what makes marriage successful, offers a fresh perspective for individuals and couples. It renders marriage a more compelling and appealing choice.

Marriage and Family Life & Their Purposes

Marriage is the core element of the family, and families establish the stable foundation for society's social well-being. The significance of a united family is extensive, highlighting the importance of marriage preparation. The Bahá'í teachings describe marriage as an institution, with friendship, unity, equality, fidelity, and love as essential components. Courting couples can consult and determine what they consider important spiritual and physical aspects of marriage, family life, and home; how they relate to and understand their shared purposes; what marital sanctity means to them; and how to realize their vision.

Research shows that healthy couples create an environment that reflects Bahá'u'lláh's view of marriage as a "fortress for well-being and salvation" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118). They can enhance individual qualities such as selflessness, patience, love, and compassion in service to each other, and children are more likely to thrive and succeed in life from this strong, unified foundation.

The Bahá'í community and its institutions have a strong interest in fostering healthy and unified marriages and families. The Bahá'í Covenant from Bahá'u'lláh unites all people and entities in the community. As individuals, married couples, and families remain connected to and faithful to this Covenant, they increase their opportunities to be united.

"And when He [God] desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book [The Kitáb-i-Aqdas]. He saith, great is His glory: 'Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.'" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118)

"The creation and rearing of children is a primary purpose of marriage. The Bahá'í Writings emphasize the mother's role in the early education of a child, but both parents are held accountable for the health, education, and well-being of the child." (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, #2324)

"Marriage is a very sacred institution. Bahá'u'lláh said its purpose is to promote unity. [We] are trying to create a high moral standard, and reinstate the sanctity of marriage." (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, #903)

"... [Y]oung women and men become acutely conscious of the exhortations of the Supreme Pen to 'enter into wedlock' that they may 'bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants'.... This generation of youth will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, 'commingled with their mother's milk', and always seek the shelter of His divine law." (Universal House of Justice, *Framework for Action*, #35)

“The family unit is the basic building block of community, and beyond, of the entire social order.” (Universal House of Justice, March 19, 2025)

ABOUT RELATIONSHIP, MARRIAGE, PARENTING, AND FAMILY EDUCATION

What Is It?

The field of relationship, marriage, parenting, and family education focuses on enhancing knowledge and skills in individuals, couples, and families, as well as preventing future issues. It aims to empower people to build marriages that bring healthy, happy stability and unity to families and communities. This field incorporates findings from scientific research and the experiences of professionals working with clients, participants, and groups.

Education in this area can include activities such as reading books, studying in groups, taking in-person or online courses, participating in workshops, mentoring, and counseling. It provides vital knowledge, skills, and attitudes about relationships, marriage, re-marriage to someone new, parenting, and family functioning to support a gradual, organic transformation process. When the benefits of this field are combined with Bahá'í teachings, they create a powerful harmony of resources.

This type of education enhances capacity, understanding, and skills. Ideally, it prepares individuals to be healthy people with strong character virtues and qualities who can become successful partners in relationships and marriage. It includes preparation for relationships and marriage for individuals and couples of all ages and experience levels. It offers marriage-boosting tools for healthy couples who want to keep learning, growing, and improving. It works well with spiritual and professional counseling for troubled marriages. It also involves skill development for those who are parenting and provides support for those building and maintaining families. Ideally, this type of education continues throughout the lifespan of couples and families.

Relationship, marriage, parenting, and family education serves:

- Unmarried individuals of all ages who are interested in learning about relationships and how to prepare for them
- Couples considering or involved in friendship, dating, courtship, and marriage
- Unmarried individuals and couples thinking about marrying again after divorce or the death of a partner
- Parents of individuals who want to teach their young children about relationships and marriage or who are considering dating, courtship, parental consent, engagement, and marriage
- Newly married couples
- Couples experiencing the usual ups and downs of married life
- Couples facing external challenges affecting their relationship
- Couples in life-stage transitions, such as becoming parents, guiding teenagers, children leaving home, or retirement
- Parents who want to raise children according to Bahá'í principles
- Couples with strong marriages who enjoy enriching their relationship further
- Challenged married couples seeking knowledge and skill-building, with support from the Spiritual Assembly and professionals

What Is It Not

Relationship, marriage, parenting, and family education is not counseling or therapy, although counselors can incorporate it into their services. It's not usually intended for couples and families who are in active crisis and facing major issues that a counselor best addresses. While marriage education can offer skill-building and

support for couples considering separation or divorce, these couples typically require additional assistance from a trained couple's counselor and consultation with a Spiritual Assembly.

The timing of education might not be suitable during an active crisis or sudden decline. Symptoms of a crisis could include:

- Serious signs of estrangement or aversion
- Daily conflict
- Any type of coercive, abusive, violent, or addictive behavior
- Infidelity (including pornography use)

Seriously challenged couples and families might find education in groups or workshops discouraging or difficult if others have a much healthier experience in their relationships. Troubled individuals could also disrupt or discourage others who are not in crisis.

Systematic Education Based on the Bahá'í Writings

A global education initiative sponsored by the Bahá'í Faith is known as the "institute process." It includes a series of group study books. (Ruhi Institute website at <https://www.ruhi.org/en/>) Its "Statement of Purposes of Methods" explains the Institute's unique approach and the refreshing method it uses to build the capacity of individuals, institutions, and communities to take charge of their spiritual, social, intellectual, and cultural development—and transformation.

The Institute's courses follow a logical sequence, with capabilities for service being progressively developed, layer by layer. The initial courses focus on children, then on junior youth, and finally on those over age 15. Book 12 on "Family and Community" may be especially interesting for those exploring a new understanding of marriage and family. Unit 1 of the book covers "The Institution of Marriage" and includes both marriage preparation and marriage. Unit 2 focuses on the family.

Taking a broad view of marriage preparation, we see that it begins with parents nurturing good character in their children and helping them experience the security of their parents' united marriage. The process then includes the education of children in developing spiritual qualities, learning about true friendship, and gaining skills in the art of consultation. Character training and capacity-building continue as youth develop the skills for marriage and parenting while teaching children's classes and leading junior youth groups. Building knowledge and skills with character and virtues supports relationships and marriages, as well as all aspects of the core activities [devotional gatherings, study circles, children's classes, and junior youth spiritual empowerment groups], each of which can include a focus on character. Through the main sequence of Ruhi courses, participants strengthen their dual moral purposes of self-development and improving the world, along with their commitment to the Covenant and spiritual habits. Therefore, marriage preparation is integrated and consistent throughout an individual's lifespan.

Currently, there is no single system for Bahá'í relationship, marriage, parenting, and family education. The methods and focus of these educational efforts will differ around the world depending on the needs of the population, resources, and venues. How scientific findings are integrated will also vary.

"Besides assisting couples through their professional expertise, counselors can draw upon their insights into the Bahá'í Teachings to provide further assistance, such as by encouraging them to develop the skill of consultation and by helping them to distinguish concepts and practices current in society from those found in the Teachings. The views of professionals and of the wider society that are contrary to the Teachings will naturally have an impact on the friends in this age of transition. As the community grows in strength and as the Teachings become more fully understood and practiced by Bahá'ís, the distinctive characteristics of Bahá'í family life will become increasingly apparent." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, September 24, 2014)

Individuals, couples, communities, agencies, and institutions will consult and decide whether to use materials already created by various people, organizations, and institutions or those developed locally as needed. The involved parties will draw on the study of guidance, consultation, learning-in-action, and reflection to determine what works best.

ROLE OF SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

Education and Offering Assistance

“The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá’í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #1304)

“The House of Justice is distressed to learn that you and your husband are continuing to experience marital difficulties. It has frequently advised believers in such situations to turn to the Spiritual Assemblies for advice and counsel, and to follow this advice in their efforts to preserve the unity of their marital relationship. It has been found useful in many instances to also seek the assistance of competent professional marriage counselors, who can provide useful insights and guidance in the use of constructive measures to bring about a greater degree of unity.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, “To Set the World in Order”, #70)

Fostering Obedience to the Bahá’í Marriage Laws

“The carrying out of the Bahá’í marriage laws, as given to the friends throughout the world, is a vital obligation of every believer who wishes to marry, and it is an important duty of every Local Spiritual Assembly to ensure that these laws are known to, and obeyed by, the believers within their jurisdiction, whether or not the Bahá’í marriage ceremony is recognized by civil law. Each Assembly, therefore, must conscientiously carry out its responsibilities in connection with the holding of Bahá’í marriage ceremonies, the recording of Bahá’í marriages in a register kept for this purpose, and the issuing of Bahá’í marriage certificates.” (Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, pp. 488-489)

RELATIONSHIP AND MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Courtship offers a chance to build unity with parents and each other’s families. People who continually improve themselves enhance the quality of their marriages, and all family members can help make the world better. Here is a quote about the natural evolution happening now.

“As you know, courtship practices differ greatly from one culture to another, and it is not yet known what pattern of courtship will emerge in the future when society has been more influenced by Bahá’í Teachings. However, there is no indication that it will resemble the practices extant in existing cultures.... In this interim period, the friends are encouraged to make great efforts to live in conformity with the Teachings and to gradually forge a new pattern of behavior, more in keeping with the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.” (Universal House of Justice, August 28, 1994, to an individual, published in *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, 4th ed., p. 16)

The future of Bahá’í courtship is unknown. Currently, couples consult on how to live out Bahá’í principles as they prepare to marry, seeking guidance from parents and trusted individuals when needed. As noble human beings, they humbly learn about each other and marriage—studying, consulting, acting, and reflecting both individually and together. Couples choose activities that help them learn about each other’s background, family, and character. They may need to re-imagine marriage as partnerships rooted in friendship and a desire to

improve the world, offering their union as a pillar of society and a resource the Bahá'í community can rely on in carrying out its plans.

Some key aspects of marriage preparation in a Bahá'í context might include:

- Detaching from the myth that each person has only one soulmate
- Working to understand and develop one's own character
- Becoming friends and companions as part of marriage preparation
- Gaining a better understanding of the character of that friend to assess compatibility as a partner and co-parent
- Cultivating a deep understanding of the relationship between sexuality, chastity, and fidelity
- Studying and practicing Bahá'í consultation, and consulting on all matters that could impact the quality of their potential marriage
- Learning how to practice the equality of women and men in their relationship
- Making an independent decision to marry without parental interference
- Delving into parental consent and discussing approaches to parents and how to build unity with them
- Requesting and obtaining parental consent to marry and adhering to the other Bahá'í marriage laws

"Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, #86)

"No less pertinent [than rectitude of conduct] to the success of the Bahá'í enterprise today are the Guardian's forthright comments on the importance of a chaste and holy life, 'with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness'. He was unequivocal in his language, summoning the friends to a life unsullied 'by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters'. ... The forces at work on the hearts and minds of the young, to whom the Guardian directed his appeal most fervently, are pernicious indeed. Exhortations to remain pure and chaste will only succeed to a limited degree in helping them to resist these forces. What needs to be appreciated in this respect is the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices parents make for their own lives, when, no matter how unintentionally, no matter how innocently, such choices condone the passions of the world—its admiration for power, its adoration of status, its love of luxuries, its attachment to frivolous pursuits, its glorification of violence, and its obsession with self-gratification. ... May every one of them [the youth] come to know the bounties of a life adorned with purity and learn to draw on the powers that flow through pure channels." (Universal House of Justice, *Framework for Action*, #16.33)

"... [T]here is nothing in the Bahá'í Writings which relates specifically to the so-called dating practices prevalent in some parts of the world, where two unmarried people of the opposite sex participate together in a social activity. In general, Bahá'ís who are planning to involve themselves in this form of behavior should become well aware of the Bahá'í Teachings on chastity and, with these in mind, should scrupulously avoid any actions which would arouse passions which might well tempt them to violate these Teachings. In deciding which acts are permissible in the light of these considerations, the youth should use their own judgment, giving due consideration to the advice of their parents, taking account of the prevailing customs of the society in which they live, and prayerfully following the guidance of their conscience. It is the sacred duty of parents to instill in their children the exalted Bahá'í standard of moral conduct, and the importance of adherence to this standard cannot be over-emphasized as a basis for true happiness and for successful marriage." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, "Investigation of Character, Courtship Practices, and Selection of a Marriage Partner", #15)

“Careful preparation for marriage is an essential first step in the preservation of Bahá’í marriage.” (Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages” Memorandum (1990), #3)

As courting couples look ahead to marriage, consultation can include questions such as:

- What does it look like to continually improve the spiritual life of one another?
- How will we incorporate praying and consulting as a couple and family?
- How will we continuously strive to abide by the Will of God?
- What will be our approach to rearing children to know and love God?
- How might we make serving humanity central to the purpose of our marriage?

Incorporating consultation, action, reflection, and learning will help couples grow closer to creating this sacred union together. They will start to view marriage as a social and moral act with a purpose beyond their immediate needs and interests.

A FEW KEY ELEMENTS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Service

Selfless service can be a vital part of a healthy marriage as couples focus on thoughtfully meeting each other’s needs and preferences. Service is part of a healthy family as the parents serve their children, and the children serve each other and their parents. Couples and children can also strengthen their personal spiritual well-being and their relationships with each other by serving other people both individually and together. This might include offering hospitality, building friendships, and participating in community-building service.

Time management and moderation are important here. If a couple’s well-being or that of their marriage and family is consistently sacrificed, it’s wise to seek guidance and make protective adjustments. Before couples take on responsibilities of work or service to others, it’s wise to pray, consult, and ask themselves, “Is this action wise and timely? Are there ways to do this work or service so that it strengthens our marriage and family and does not cause harm?” It’s crucial to recognize that one of the main ways couples and families serve as examples and contribute to global unity is by maintaining their well-being and unity.

“A truly Bahá’í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá’ís marry and found truly Bahá’í homes, the type Bahá’u’lláh wishes them to be. ...” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, “To Set the World in Order”, #24)

“The concept of a coherent life of service is as relevant to the life of the family as it is to the life of an individual. The complex demands and opportunities the family faces continually evolve over time. Generally, advancing together on the path of service strengthens the family, and helps it address its many responsibilities across every stage of the life of its members. At certain times when a possibility for a more demanding service arises—whether for a member or for the family as a whole—the bonds of support within a dedicated Bahá’í family can make the wholehearted embrace of such a sacrificial endeavor possible. At such times it is vital to keep in mind the essential nature of sacrifice, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, is to give up the concerns of the human condition for the things of God. Sacrifice makes possible greater service, but it is not the family itself that is to be sacrificed.” (Universal House of Justice, March 19, 2025)

“Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and

shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. As they call on one another in their homes and pay visits to families, friends and acquaintances, they enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import, deepen their knowledge of the Faith, share Bahá'u'lláh's message, and welcome increasing numbers to join them in a mighty spiritual enterprise. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they extend their efforts widely to involve ever-growing contingents of participants in classes that become centers of attraction for the young and strengthen the roots of the Faith in society. They assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization." (Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2008)

"...[I]f the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the pre-eminent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? What possible influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace?" (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #740)

"There are many ways in which one can serve, and each person has to choose what he or she can do best within his or her possibilities and limits. Opportunities to serve the Cause do not necessarily exclude the possibility of rendering assistance to one's family. It is important to note that every aspect of a person's life is an element of service to Bahá'u'lláh: the love and respect one has for one's parents; the pursuit of one's education; the nurturing of good health; the acquisition of a trade or profession; one's behavior toward others and the upholding of a high moral standard; one's marriage and the rearing of one's children; one's activities in teaching the Faith and in building up the strength of the Bahá'í community; and, of course, one's daily prayer and study of the Writings." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, "Family Life", #119)

Consultation As a Fundamental Instrument for Unity

There is great promise in viewing Bahá'í consultation as the default way of relating to others and a way of life, rather than just a specific activity to be performed in institutional settings. The Writings encourage using marital consultation as a foundation for creating just and unified family lives. When Bahá'í consultation is a regular part of courtship, marriage, and family life, it becomes second nature over time and is then naturally applied in other community relationships, such as at work or among friends, extended family, and in other Bahá'í activities and institutions. Couples can use it to discuss everyday topics or serious issues like dealing with difficulties, managing money, rearing children, building family unity, and more.

[When asked about specific rules of conduct to govern the relationship between husbands and wives] "...for example, the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters must be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgment they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, "To Set the World in Order", #33)

"Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives...." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, #2160)

Friendship

Friendship plays a vital role in preparing for marriage, and research confirms it as a key element in healthy marriages. The ability to build and sustain a strong friendship lays the groundwork for a lasting partnership, mutual support, and service to others. Furthermore, a community where friendships are supportive and nurturing naturally helps protect and uphold the institution of marriage as an essential part of its vitality. A strong ethic of friendship equips a community to be a worthy foundation for marriages and helps couples thrive within them.

“O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

“If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

“Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, #92)

Equality

We may find it helpful to view equality in this context as maintaining a balanced and respectful partnership between two people in a relationship or marriage. This partnership honors each other's minds, hearts, and souls and encourages the couple to work together as a team. Equality, based on justice and unity, along with respect for each other's qualities, talents, and skills, influences every part of courtship and marriage. Equality helps the couple to value each other as human beings and appreciate each other's ability to be partners who think, consult, love, work, parent, and serve other people.

The Bahá'í Writings sometimes compare equality to a bird that needs both wings to be strong enough to fly. If one wing is weak, the bird has trouble flying smoothly and successfully. Marriage, like a bird, requires both partners to be strong and work together to enjoy the full benefits and potential of their union. Interdependence, along with independence, is essential for the best results. This means that, as individuals, couples need to be mature enough before entering marriage to function effectively on their own and be strong partners. With wings, each is unique, with neither the left nor the right being the same.

“The Bahá'í perspective on marriage transcends dichotomies arising from permissive and regressive perspectives prevalent in society. In Bahá'í marriage, love, equality, intimacy, fidelity, sexual relations, childbearing, and childrearing are integrated and their interconnection strengthened, establishing a fortress for personal and social well-being. Permissive social practices undermine marriage and the family by disaggregating these features that are essential to human flourishing, while regressive practices overemphasize or distort one or another of these features to oppress family members. Adherence to the Teachings helps to resolve such problems. Much needs to be learned across diverse cultural settings throughout the world about the implications of all the features of Bahá'í marriage found in the Teachings. For example, central to the development of a new pattern of Bahá'í married life is the principle of the equality of women and men. As this principle is applied between the wife and husband within the marriage, the relationship is strengthened and thrives, and girls and boys will be raised with a new understanding of equality and its practical expression. The ramifications of this principle will thus gradually extend to future generations and contribute to the advancement of women until ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s expectation that women will ‘participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world’ is entirely realized.” (Universal House of Justice, March 19, 2025)

POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO PROMOTE UNIFIED, HAPPY, AND HEALTHY MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

Ideas to Consider from Marriage Transformation®

Below are potential actions that can help build strong marriages and families. They are organized by how Bahá'ís can act individually and within couples and marriages. These actions include educating the community about maintaining healthy relationships, marriages, and families. They also focus on becoming role models and advocates who emphasize the importance of good relationships, marriages, and families in the Bahá'í community, as well as when collaborating with people on building healthy communities and improving the world.

As individuals, couples, Spiritual Assemblies, and communities begin the process of improving marriages and families, it is likely important to consider when ongoing education efforts can be most beneficial. Each Assembly and community will choose its own gradual and natural process and set its own goals. Ongoing education and study of the guidance in the Bahá'í teachings will support individuals in developing knowledge and skills. Further growth in the art of reflection, consultation, and learning-in-action within a community will also be valuable in this unfolding and organic process.

Participation in the institute process and core community activities generally improves people's ability to form relationships of all types. Building character and virtues, making moral decisions, and practicing spiritual behaviors are part of the materials and activities for children's classes, junior youth spiritual empowerment groups, and study circles. Devotional gatherings can focus on relationship, marriage, and family topics, while also offering opportunities for courting, married couples, and families to worship together. As participants engage in service within these activities, friendships and bonds can grow stronger. Serving each other and other people becomes a lifestyle that benefits couples and families. Families whose members serve each other well and maintain an outward-focused service attitude can become strong examples and key entities for transforming neighborhoods and communities.

FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COUPLES

Enhancing Personal Conduct

- Engage in ongoing character development
- Be involved in the institute process, core activities, and outward-oriented service
- Regularly use prayer, reflection, and consultation for character discernment of potential partners; within couple relationships that are moving toward marriage; and within marriages to maintain awareness of strengths and growth areas, set goals, and take necessary actions to achieve improvement
- Seek help early from skilled and trustworthy sources for any needed courting-couple relationship strengthening and premarital education, for marriage strengthening, or for addressing marital difficulties
- Practice and model purity and chastity for our families, neighbors, friends, and coworkers; these complex concepts include maintaining uplifting and chaste thoughts, positive words, honest motivations, a loving heart, and a spiritually focused soul and keeping sexual intimacy as a God-given gift to occur only within marriage for building unity between marriage partners and as a sacred act that brings children into the marriage to create a family
- Follow Bahá'í marriage laws
- Maintain marital faithfulness and sustain family love and unity to the best of their ability
- Regard marriage as a sacred commitment
- Practice forgiveness, seeking healing, reconciliation, and unity-building to the best of their ability as promptly as possible in any upset or difficulty; and be willing to seek confidential consultative assistance with this process as needed from skilled and trustworthy sources
- Eliminate gossip and backbiting about relationships, marriages, and families of their own or others
- Pray on their own for relationships and marriages generally and their own in particular
- Be accepting of the choice some make not to be married

Participating in Study/Education

- Encourage children, youth, and adults to study Bahá'í and social research-based sources, understand, and live according to the Bahá'í teachings, guidance, and laws about character, relationships, marriage, parenting, and family
- Participate in relationship, marriage, parenting, and family education opportunities provided by Spiritual Assemblies or other institutions, agencies, Bahá'í schools (weekly, seasonal, and permanent), companies, or organizations; seek additional education and skill-building opportunities as needed
- Engage in the process of character education and transformation to empower practicing rectitude of conduct in relationships, marriages, and families
- Periodically include prayers and readings focused on the strengthening of the well-being of marriages and families as part of community occasions, such as the Nineteen-Day Feast, or family and neighborhood activities, such as devotional gatherings or home visits

Serving and Becoming Examples for Others

- Demonstrate through our words and actions respect and love for the sacred institution of marriage as the foundation for family, neighborhood, community, and global unity and prosperity, and as a “fortress for well-being and salvation” (Bahá'u'lláh)
- Share encouragement and hope, new conceptions of marriage and family, and a vision of unified marriages and families
- Encourage and participate in community life, including working with groups of families to build healthy and vibrant communities
- Model sincere marriage and family efforts and successes with others
- Share laughter, humor, and hospitality together and with others
- Regard the health and happiness of marriages as a major contributor to the well-being of children
- Be sensitive, moderate, wise, and consultative about work or service beyond the marriage or family to assess whether sacrificial service is wise and the family can support it, or these activities would negatively affect a marriage partner's or the family's relationships and well-being

FOR A SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

This section includes potential actions for an Assembly to review and consider implementation, based on the conditions and demographics of their community.

Gaining Skills and Knowledge

- Use prayer, consultation, and reflection to gain understanding of the overall health of relationships, marriages, parents, and families in the community.
- Track statistical data and trends for marriages and divorces in their jurisdiction to establish clear goals for improvement, such as increasing adherence to Bahá'í marriage laws, decreasing the divorce rate, or enhancing pre-marriage preparation.
- Enhance the knowledge and skills of the Spiritual Assembly and its representatives to effectively meet with individuals and couples before marriage, those facing issues in their relationships or marriages, and those applying for divorce or seeking reconciliation. Building knowledge also includes recognizing signs of abusive or violent relationships and understanding how to respond to ensure everyone's safety and accountability.
- Strengthen the ability of the Spiritual Assembly and its representatives to skillfully guide couples who are in challenged marriages or who apply for divorce to achieve reconciliation before or after the granting of a year of waiting (alt: year of patience); provided the Assembly has first ensured the safety of all involved

- Be aware that some people may feel compelled to accept and fulfill service requests from others, even if saying “yes” could lead to negative consequences in their marriage or family. They might need consultative support to evaluate their options.

Providing Education

- Provide regular, proactive opportunities for spiritually based relationship education, including both knowledge and skill building, to unmarried individuals so they develop strong character and discernment to know the character of a partner. This prepares them for friendships, relationships, courtship, and marriage, while helping to prevent divorce. Also, offer referrals for stepfamily education prior to marriage when needed.
- Offer parenting education for those raising children of all ages.
- Provide spiritual guidance to parents on how to help their children practice chastity, when to avoid interfering in an unmarried relationship, how to support a couple's independent decision to marry, and their role in considering parental consent for marriage.
- Discourage cohabitation and adultery with a balance of love, forbearance, and understanding, along with firmness in laws and principles.
- Offer regular, proactive opportunities for spiritually based marriage education, including knowledge and skill-building, so married members can maintain strong, happy, and faithful marriages that serve their families and community, while setting a good example for their children and others.
- Educate about Bahá'í marriage laws as well as teachings regarding divorce and its negative effects.
- Share information about Bahá'í relationships and marriage as needed with seekers and those collaborating with their community.

CONSIDERING POSSIBLE LINES OF ACTION

Potential Ideas to Consider from Marriage Transformation®

Through the processes of study, consultation, learning-in-action, and reflection over time, Spiritual Assemblies, other institutions and agencies, and community members can begin to develop their own purposes and lines of action that are unique to the experience and evolving knowledge of the community. These will reflect the creative and diverse ideas of everyone as the transformation process takes shape and evolves.

Some possible actions to consider are to:

- Track and celebrate wedding anniversaries as a way to honor the institution of marriage and recognize the perseverance of couples in their marriages.
- Consider and create opportunities for single Bahá'ís, both youth and adults, to meet and spend time together in a safe, supportive environment, including service opportunities whenever possible. Behaviors to avoid include making embarrassing comments, teasing, and gossip that could cause a couple to hide a developing relationship.
- Provide opportunities for pre-youth and youth, as well as those working with them, to learn about character choices and relationship skills.
- Offer thorough marriage preparation for each seriously courting or engaged couple over several weeks or months, preferably including time with a skilled or trained married mentor couple.
- Arrange follow-up meetings (at least two) between a mentor couple and a married couple during the first year of marriage for support and to answer questions.
- Facilitate ongoing relationship and marriage strengthening groups led by trained individuals or experienced married couples, either at the community level or as part of sessions at seasonal or permanent schools.
- Conduct relationship and marriage education and skill-building workshops or study sessions periodically.