

# Achieving Marital Bliss



## Jim & Sue's Hypothetical Divorce: Chapter 5

Unfortunately, Jim and Sue cannot seem to agree on an equally acceptable Shared Parenting Visitation Schedule. They both love their kids and do not want to miss the normal, everyday moments that they are used to.

Although an impasse is one possibility, the mediator presses on and asks Jim and Sue to address each and every possible solution to this problem, even if they are not desirable. He then gives them a turn to list the options they came up with.

Jim speaks first and states his ideas followed by Sue and her possibilities. Unsurprisingly, they named similar choices, such as Sue remaining in the home with the children while Jim finds a new home close to their neighborhood so the children's school wouldn't change. They both conclude that they could split the week in half this way, and not drastically affect the kid's schedule.

## Chat Before You Commit

Unfortunately, Family Mediators often hear this statement, "Never get married!" I chose to use the word "unfortunately" because I genuinely believe that marriage *can* be a wonderful institution. But there's a few things, unique to each couple, that should be discussed before the invitations are sent out and the champagne is poured.

According to Alison Taylor, author of *The Handbook of Family Dispute Resolution*, there are specific issues that every engaged couple needs to address in order to ensure wedded bliss. Taylor states, the couple embarks on a new "sense of themselves as a socially constructed unit—as 'us.'" Thus, each couple should build their foundation on solid ground not shaky soil through various conversations.

Before delving into Taylor's list, here are some suggestions from an informal survey I conducted amongst family members and friends who are presently married and/or have been divorced. Some walked down the aisle a few months ago, some a few years ago and some have been married longer than I have been alive.

The two most popular subjects I heard were **finances** and **children**. Religion seemed to come next followed by housework, pets and the location where the couple will live.

Under the money category I heard questions like this:

**How will we spend/save our earnings? How will we split the bills each month? Will we share a credit card?**

When it came to discussing children, these types of questions were raised:

**How many do we want? Where will they go to school? How will we discipline them? What type of religion will they be?**

And in no particular order, here are the other themes important to the couples I spoke with:

**Will we have pets?**

**How will the housework be divided?**

**How will we spend holidays?**

**If our careers changed, would we move? If so, how far is acceptable?**

*(continued on page 2)*

## A Brief Matrimonial History

Each culture and religious faith have their own specific interpretations of what a marriage is and how it should be formalized. But have they always been a formal affair? Did the bride always toss the bouquet?

According to one source, Confucius was one of the first to formerly define what marriage is by stating: "Marriage is the union (of the representatives) of two different surnames, in friendship and in love, in order to continue the posterity of former ages and to produce those

who shall preside at the sacrifices of heaven and earth." But others believe that marriage was born out of very primal human needs and was first referenced in Hammurabi's code and The Bible. <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special%3ASearch&search=history+of+marriage&btn=Go>

## Chats (continued)

**The level of importance intimacy plays in the relationship.**

**The ways in which conflict will be handled and solved.**

**How do we expect that our ideas, dreams, assumptions will change/stay after marriage?**

Though this list came to be in an informal way, the responses that were given were real. They reflect the variety of values that each person has, individually and as a spouse. A few times the statements I heard were prefaced with, "this may seem silly but..." or "I know this doesn't seem like a big issue but..."

The true "but" in all of this, is that marriage is a wonderful thing, BUT it takes work. Constant communication, compromise, flexibility, spontaneity and trust are just a few of the qualities that need to be expressed, by both spouses. In order for the institution to withstand the pain, difficulty, excitement and enjoyment that will surely come its way, an established communication path should be in place.

Not only do I appreciate the suggestions I received from my friends and family but I applaud their wisdom. The issues they raised were spot on with Taylor's conclusions as communication, work and financial matters, household tasks, parenting and involvement with in-laws, all make her list. She also includes, "decision making, former relationships and outside influences." Thus, couples should



their boundaries and level of structure which will be unique to them. What's imperative is not the guideline itself but the fact that it exists.

To achieve a strong marital base, couples should make the time to sit down and have these chats. Grab some coffee or go for a bike ride. Take a walk or go to dinner at your favorite spot. Regardless of where or how it occurs, the lines of communication should be opened before you begin registering at Pottery Barn and Pier 1.

Taylor, A. *The Handbook of Family Dispute Resolution: Mediation Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002.