

## MESSAGE ON MARRIAGE TO YOUNG WOMEN

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When Barbara Dafoe Whitehead was growing up, her father gave her four rules for selecting a husband. He should be a man of good character and conscience and a man who will make a good father and be a good provider. He must not be an asthmatic. Her father was a doctor and an asthmatic.

Ms. Whitehead did find a man who exuded most of these qualities and has been married to him for 39 years. The one area in which she rebelled: she married a man who is asthmatic.

"Things are different now for girls," Ms. Whitehead said. "Both of my girls are single and in their 30s. One of them shared with me that someone in college told her that to think about marriage shows a lack of ambition. In the popular culture -- reality TV, celebrity gossip, etc. -- young women today hear messages of heartbreak and failure, heartbreak and cheating, heartbreak and lying. There is NOT a lot out there about being successful in marriage."

According to Ms. Whitehead, only 20 percent of young adults came from broken homes in the late '70s compared to 40 percent in the late '90s. Many women have first hand experience with divorce. These young people gather a tremendous amount of misinformation along the way that if acted upon will significantly lower their chances of success in marriage.

"I believe there are five pervasive messages of failure that young women are receiving today," Ms. Whitehead said.

\* Teenage sex has nothing to do with having a healthy marriage. Two thirds of today's teens believe it is OK to have sex if you love the person. The truth is the consequences of teen sex can last a lifetime while the relationship doesn't.

\* It is OK to have kids first because you can find a guy later. The highest percentage of unwed births today are to women in their 20s. Although they hope they can find a guy later on, evidence shows that their chances of successful marriage decline as do their chances of ever marrying.

\* People should live together before marriage. The evidence suggests that it does not increase your chances of having a successful marriage and there is strong evidence that it increases your chances for divorce.

\* There is nothing you can do to prepare for a healthy, successful marriage. There are many who believe having a lot of bad relationships is the only way to have a good one and heartbreak is unavoidable.

\* There is nothing you can do to change your chances of divorce. The mantra for today's young people is "50 percent of all marriages end in divorce," Ms. Whitehead said. They believe that a successful marriage is a roll of the dice. That is not true. There is a lot they can do.

"The truth is, young women in their teens and 20s should have tremendous hope for a successful marriage in the future," Ms. Whitehead said. "If you want to have a healthy marriage, here are some things to consider:

Caring adults can utilize the excellent resource "Making a Love Connection" to assist teens in making healthy decisions. At the heart of the message of hope is a message about sequence or timing. Young women can significantly improve their chances of having a healthy marriage by finishing high school, waiting until they are out of their teens to marry and waiting to have a child until they are married. If they do these things, their chances of living in poverty or divorcing decrease dramatically, and their chances of having a healthy marriage go way up.

Teen girls looking for a committed relationship, shouldn't settle for any old guy. Don't live with someone before marriage. Most women want a committed relationship. When they marry, they typically do so in front of many people. There is no mistake about what they are doing. Moving in with someone is private. There is nobody there except maybe the moving guys. One young lady said, "I really didn't care about wedding vows, but when I lived with my boyfriend we didn't vow to do anything."

Young women should complete their education in their 20s and marry before the age of 30. In general, research shows that if people marry in their 20s, their marriages are distinctly happier than if they marry later in life.

Girls should date with the intentions of marrying. It's important for them to consider what they are looking for in a mate and don't date guys who aren't marriage minded. They should put themselves in places where they are likely to meet the kind of guys they are interested in marrying.

Young adults shouldn't wait until they are engaged to get marriage education. They need to study relationships as much as possible. People who know better do better. It's important to value marriage education and share the knowledge with others.

Lastly, they should consider a small wedding, if marriage is in their plans. Many people delay getting married until they can pay for a huge bash or a destination wedding that stresses them out and makes them crabby and tired. By focusing on the relationship instead of the big day itself, couples can get a good start emotionally and financially and spend more time together.