

BETTER TOGETHER LEADER'S GUIDE FOR MENTOR COUPLES

GETTING STARTED

Every year, fewer and fewer people get married in the Catholic Church.

They decide quite simply that the Church doesn't really have anything to offer them. For whatever reason—whether they don't see the support of a loving community or they don't recognize the wisdom of thousands of years and billions of couples—every year more and more couples leave the Church out of their wedding plans.

Or maybe—and this might be worse—fewer couples are even considering whether the Church has anything to offer them or their marriage. Maybe the Church isn't even on their radar.

At Dynamic Catholic we think this is a tragedy, and we want to do something about it. We believe that marriage is a part of the incredible dream God has for each couple, that God wants every married couple to have the most amazing marriage possible. We believe that, while many people have said that families are at the heart of every civilized society, marriage is at the heart of every family. We believe if marriages falter, the family falters, and as the family goes, so goes society. We believe that marriages are stronger with God than without him, and that the Church has thousands of years of wisdom to share with couples and help them live a better life.

And we believe there is hope.

There is hope that no matter where a couple is when they come to you, you can reach them and make a profound impact on their lives. You can show them the hope the Church has for their future, and how the Church wants to help them live a better life. When you help someone have a great marriage, you are giving them a gift that is passed on to their children, their families, their friends, their employers, their neighbors, and society. Helping couples have an incredible marriage is a great hope for our Church, our nation, and the world.

So there are two decisions you must make that will impact just how incredible the BETTER TOGETHER experience is.

1. How much do you care about marriage?

Is it a little important? Or is it very important? Every person will answer a little differently. Every parish will answer a little differently. And, of course, it's easy to say you care very much, while your actions show something vastly different.

It is easy for a parish to write off marriage preparation or to outsource it altogether. After all, parish life is busy with lots of activities, and it is tempting to not make the time to help couples preparing for marriage. It can also be easy to see marriage preparation as a nuisance, just another

hoop to jump through for the parish and the couple. At times, that can lead to doing the bare minimum just to get by.

Dynamic Catholic invites you to dream of a bright future for your parish. A future filled with vibrant marriages and therefore thriving families. Join us in a dream for the kinds of marriages that branch out into the whole community and impact the lives of thousands.

BETTER TOGETHER has a total of 12 sessions covering God's dream for marriage, communication, conflict resolution, and important subjects all the way through to the wedding day. This program is designed so that engaged couples can complete it at their own pace and be accompanied through the sessions by a mentor couple of the parish.

This program is unlike any other. It is eminently adaptable to you, to the couple, to your parish, and to how big your dreams are for the greatness of marriage.

ENRICHMENT: Finally, we also discovered in our testing that many couples who were already married wanted to experience the BETTER TOGETHER program to help their marriages grow stronger. Here are some ways you can use the program to strengthen and enrich the marriages in your parish.

- Encourage married couples to go through the BETTER TOGETHER experience on their own, using the online videos and workbook.
- Couples could form small groups and go through the BETTER TOGETHER experience in their homes or at the parish.
- A deacon or other facilitator could offer to lead an enrichment series for the parish.

HELPFUL TIPS FROM GREAT LEADERS:

Here are fourteen great tips to get you started:

1. Make sure the couple knows you care. Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Showing you care is in the little things. This program is a great start, but so is having beverages or light snacks available, creating a warm and inviting space, and making sure the couple is comfortable.
2. Start on time and end on time. Honoring time honors people.
3. Learn the couple's first names before you meet with them. This is the simplest way to demonstrate that they matter to you.
4. Greet the couple at the door when they arrive. Welcome them. Look them in the eye and thank them for coming.

5. Be you. Let them get to know you. They are going to share some intimate information about their lives with you. If they don't know you, they won't trust you, and if they don't trust you, they won't open up to you.
6. Repeat yourself. Once is not enough. Important points need to be repeated over and over again. Make connections between what they learned and discussed last time you were together and what they are learning today. Keep repeating key phrases and themes. Repetition is a powerful force in educating and inspiring.
7. Be prepared. Review the materials before your meeting, mark the Scripture passages in your Bible, watch the videos, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Being prepared sends so many messages to the couple: "You matter." "This is important." "I want to make this a great experience for you."
8. Be clear. Leading them means guiding them step-by-step through your time together. So let them know what's next. "Now we are going to cover Session 2." The more specific, the better, so feel free to add to your directions: "Open to page 32 and follow along under the heading as we watch the video." Being specific helps our brains to envision directions. Putting directions in the positive ("Keep your glass up") helps us get it right. When we put them in the negative ("Don't spill that"), we envision spilling the glass and often do just that!
9. Tell your story. One of the most powerful tools you have to lead this couple is your story. Know your story and share it—not necessarily all at once, but in bits and pieces as they relate to the content.
10. Smile. Really. Smiling at someone is a gift and conveys a sincere warmth. It just feels good when someone smiles at you.
11. Don't be afraid of silence. After you ask a question, anticipate a pause of several seconds. Some people need longer than others to process. That's OK.
12. Start praying for the couples in marriage prep today. Let them know you are praying for them every day. Pay attention to what is happening in their lives; they will reveal this to you in a hundred ways throughout your time together.
13. It's also important to realize that you cannot cover everything. You can't teach them everything about the Catholic faith. You can't combat every misconception they have about Catholicism. But if you give them a glimpse of the truth, beauty, and goodness that

are at the core of our faith, they will get in touch with their appetite for these things—and that is no small thing.

14. Most of all, never get discouraged, and don't let what you CAN'T do interfere with what you CAN do. What you can do is love the couple, walk with them in their journey, pray that they open themselves up to God's dream for their lives, and give them the most dynamic experience of Catholicism they have ever had.

Welcome!

Something wonderful is about to happen to you. God dreams for your marriage to be the greatest source of peace, comfort, and joy in your life. Your marriage will have a powerful impact on your friends and family, the neighborhood you live in, the company you work for, the parish you are a part of, your future children, the schools they attend, and the whole world.

Each of the 5 sessions you are about to experience is designed with 60 minutes of content for you. Here is what to expect:

VIDEO

Each session starts with a short video sharing wisdom from our presenters

WATCH AND DISCUSS

Within each session you will find 5 segments, each including a brief video and ending with an exercise for you. Some of these exercises are designed to be done together as a couple, some done on your own individually.

Keep in mind that this content can be adapted to fit your needs. You can adjust the amount of material you cover to fit your schedule.

One of the most incredible gifts God has given us as human beings is the ability to dream. Unlike any other creature, we can look into the future, imagine something bigger and better, and then come back into the present and work to make that richly imagined future a reality.

At Dynamic Catholic our dream is that the Catholic family would be a beacon of hope for society. And we believe that at the heart of your family is your strong marriage.

May the grace of our generous God inspire you and give you courage, wisdom, and patience.

The Dynamic Catholic Team

Helpful Tip: *The first step in building trust is to allow the couple to know you. Tell them about yourself. Share a few things about your history and your life—some ups and downs, hobbies, likes and dislikes. Maybe even something you really have to work hard at in your life. You don't have to give them your whole life story and you shouldn't share something that will make them uncomfortable, but we can't really trust someone we don't know.*

Session 1 - God's Dream for Marriage (6 Videos - 26 minutes, 15 seconds)

Video 1) Wisdom from Dominick and Rebecca (4:21) - watch and discuss

Video 1.1) Why are you here? (3:00)

Begin by getting really honest about these two questions.

- 1. Why are you here in marriage preparation?**
- 2. Why are you getting married?**

Talk to your bride-to-be about them. Share your answers with your future husband. Tell your beloved why you want to be married to her. Share why you are excited to be marrying your husband-to-be.

Video 1.2) Better Together (4:14)

This is God’s dream for your marriage. He dreams that you will help each other become holy. God dreams that you will be better together.

Discuss:

Think about how you make each other better. Take a few minutes to finish the following statements and discuss some of your thoughts:

She makes me a better person by... He makes me a better person by...

You have a deep desire to become the-best-version-of-yourself, and your future spouse is going to help you become the-best-version-of-yourself. Nothing is more attractive than that.

Helpful Tip: *Episodes 1.2 and 1.3 invite the couple to explore what they really want out of marriage and out of life. Remind them that the marriage prep experience isn’t about you or the Church. It’s about them.*

Video 1.3) How do you like being lied to? (4:56)

Discuss:

Discuss with your future husband or wife some times in your life when something didn’t go as you had planned, but in the end things turned out even better than you had imagined.

Video 1.4) What It's Really About (5:35)

God has a big vision for your marriage. It's greater than anything we could dream up. It's based not on missing out, but on gaining something bigger and better.

God's vision of marriage will unfold before you in the years to come, as you enjoy the fruits of your life together, but it can be summed up in three words: **faithful, lifelong, and life-giving.**

Is God's vision demanding? Sure. A faithful, lifelong, life-giving marriage demands that we passionately strive to be the-best-version-of-ourselves. But as St. John Paul the Great said, "It is natural for the human heart to accept demands, even difficult ones, in the name of love for an ideal, and above all in the name of love for a person."

Pray to God and invite him to exceed your expectations for your marriage preparation experience. Invite him to help you exceed the expectations of your wife- or husband-to-be. And invite him to exceed your expectations for your marriage.

What do you sense God saying to you in this section?

Video 1.5) No Regrets (4:09) – watch and discuss

Helpful Tip: It's OK to let things sink in and take them bit by bit. This program has been purposefully designed to help the couples take one small step each session closer to the vision God has for their lives and their marriage. Don't worry if you feel like you aren't doing enough. Don't worry about sounding smart or looking impressive. Just be the witness they need. You are the Church to them right now. Make sure their experience is incredible.

Session 2 – What are Your Dreams? (6 Videos – 20 minutes, 0 seconds)

Video 2) Wisdom from Sarah and Andy (3:31) – watch and discuss

Video 2.1) Two Great Gifts (3:42)

Exercise:

Are you great at dreaming? Have you forgotten how? Think about some of your dreams as a child, such as what you wanted to be when you grew up. What kind of dreams do you have now? How good are you at anticipating and preparing? Talk to your future husband or wife about these questions and your ability to dream.

Video 2.2) Your Dream List (3:42)

Here are ten categories of dreams to help spur your thoughts and get you started.

1. Adventure: If you could travel to any three places in the next ten years, where would you go?

2. Creative: What hobby or sport would you like to pursue?

3. Physical: What aspect of your physical health and wellness would you like to improve?

4. Legacy: What ministry, cause, or charity would you like to start supporting or increase your support for?

5. Emotional: What one relationship would you like to improve or grow?

6. Psychological: If you could suspend fear, what activity would you try?

7. Professional: What's your dream job?

8. Intellectual: If you could speak an additional language, what would it be?

9. Spiritual: What's your dream for how you might develop a greater sense of inner peace? Who does God want you to be?

10. Character: What character qualities do you notice in other people that you would like to expand in your own life?

Exercise:

Spend ten minutes answering the question for yourself. **What are your dreams?** Begin a dream list and write them down.

Use the ten dream categories to give clarity to your process. There are no right or wrong answers. Write quickly; don't think too much. Don't analyze or edit yourself as you make your list. Write everything down, even the things you feel are foolish. Your answers don't have to be definitive; they will change over time. In fact, some of them will probably change by the time you finish marriage preparation. But it is still important to write them down now. It will help you as you venture through the rest of your life. So write your list, and when you are done, date it and share it with your future spouse.

good couple. Use this exercise as an incredible opportunity. It's the start of a wonderful conversation that will never end. Your marriage gives you a partner to dream with.

Exercise:

Dream together. You don't have to get everything down right now. This is just the start of your life of dreaming. It can help to use time as a structure.

What are three five-year dreams you have for your marriage?

How about three ten-year dreams?

Three twenty-five-year dreams?

What are three fifty-year dreams you have for your marriage?

Imagine what it will be like to look into each other's eyes at seventy, eighty, ninety years old. What kind of person do you want to be for your wife? What kind of woman do you want your husband to see? When you look back at your life when you're ninety, what do you hope you will remember?

Video 2.5) Red Flags (3:11) – watch and discuss

Session 3 – The Expectations Gap (6 Videos – 21 minutes, 36 seconds)

Video 3) Wisdom from Allen and Anita (3:18) – watch and discuss

Video 3.1) Disappointment, Resentment, Anger, Frustration and Loss of Trust (3:25)

Exercise:

Can you think of a time when you expected someone to do or say something and they failed to do so? Do you think the expectations were clear on their end too?

Video 3.2) Everybody Has Expectations About Everything (3:03)

Exercise:

Write down one expectation you have of your future husband or wife in each of these areas:

1. How you will treat each other
2. What your family will look like
3. How you will practice your faith
4. How you will interact with each other’s families during the holidays

Video 3.3) What Do You Think Your Spouse Expects from You? (3:15) – watch and discuss

Video 3.4) Building on Your Strengths (3:38) – watch and discuss

Building on your strengths as a couple will help you navigate the more challenging areas of your relationship. All couples have unresolved conflicts in which they learn how to approach their differences in healthy ways.

Video 3.5) Expectations Change (4:57) – watch and discuss

Session 4 – Seven Levels of Intimacy (6 Videos – 27 minutes, 22 seconds)

Video 4) Wisdom from Dominick and Rebecca (3:57) – watch and discuss

Video 4.1) Clichés, Facts and Opinions (6:52) – watch and discuss

Video 4.2) Hopes and Dreams (3:59)

Exercise:

Get a dream journal together. Write down some of the dreams you shared in Session 2 so you can continue to have regular conversations about your dreams as a couple.

Video 4.3) Feelings (4:06)

There are five aspects to the fifth level of intimacy, feelings:

1. Knowing our feelings
2. Being comfortable expressing our feelings
3. Expressing them at the right time
4. Expressing them in the right place
5. Expressing them to the right person

Feelings actually become an area of strength when we remember that love is based on acceptance, not on understanding.

Exercise:

Discuss the five aspects of this level. Where are you strong? Where are you weak? When you are upset, how do you like to be approached? Do you make each other feel accepted or do you constantly strive for understanding? How do you like to be approached when you are experiencing bad feelings? Do you want to be comforted? Do you want to be left alone? Do you want a silent kind gesture? Do you want to be distracted? Write this one thing down and share it with your future spouse.

Video 4.4) Faults, Fears and Failures (4:42)

Exercise:

Share with your spouse three fears that you have about the future and about yourself.

Perhaps take some time to share not only what the fear is, but where that fear comes from.

When you are done, exchange your notes and read about each other’s fears. Then talk about how you can avoid feeding your future spouse’s fears, and how you can help your spouse when you see they are hiding.

Video 4.5) Legitimate Needs (3:46)

Exercise:

Set aside a block of time between now and your wedding just for carefree timelessness together. Perhaps it is a full afternoon or two. Maybe it is an entire day or weekend. No agenda, no distractions. Just be together. Use and enjoy that time together as your intimacy builds.

Session 5 – Conflict is Inevitable (6 Videos – 25 minutes, 44 seconds)

Video 5) Wisdom from Lisa and Leo (4:06) – watch and discuss

Video 5.1) Conflict Happens (4:57) – watch and discuss

Video 5.2) Common Purpose (3.31)

Exercise:

Define your common purpose as a married couple. Feel free to use one of the following three options as is or use one as a base to write your own similar purpose.

- To be better together
- To help each other become the-best-version-of-yourselves
- To help each other get to heaven

Video 5.3) Three Kinds of Couples (4:07) – watch and discuss

Video 5.4) Keys to Healthy Conflict (4:49)

When conflict arises, husband and wife must have a plan for how to navigate through the conflict for the good of the team. That plan will always include:

1. Remember purpose.

You have agreed on your common, unchanging purpose as a couple. When you disagree, remind yourselves of that purpose. Frame the conversation around how this disagreement can help you fulfill your purpose as a couple. For example, if your purpose is to help each other become the-best-version-of-yourselves, then the focus of the discussion becomes how your opinions or ideas actually can make that happen.

Now you are arguing for something; you are no longer arguing against something. Most important, you are no longer arguing against someone. It is no longer personal. It is purposeful.

2. Breathe deeply.

Thomas Jefferson famously said, “When angry count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred.” He was right. Taking a break when conflict arises can be your good friend. Do something that relaxes you. Slow down. Take a walk. Listen to soothing music. Inhale deeply. All of these can calm the process and help you focus on teamwork rather than on being an individual. Slowing the process can help you focus on your partner and what they are feeling and also help you delay the need to express your own thoughts and feelings. It creates space in the conversation and prevents you from taking things personally or losing your cool.

3. Listen attentively.

We all desire to be heard. It is one of the ways we feel most loved. This is especially true with our husband or wife. This person who matters most to us can give us the greatest gift of love by simply listening to our deepest feelings and hurts, maintaining eye contact so we know they are seeking to know us deeply, and occasionally offering a word of kindness even when they may disagree with part of what we say.

By simply listening attentively to your spouse, you are de-escalating the situation and offering love right in the middle of an argument. You are communicating acceptance even in disagreement.

4. Accept responsibility.

Healthy people accept at least partial responsibility for the issue. They do not retreat into defensiveness and refuse to accept any blame whatsoever. Healthy people own their actions and words. They do not resort to excuse making.

The act of accepting responsibility underscores the fact that you two are a team. And it points toward a way forward in which both of you create the solution, rather than basing your view on I win/you lose. When both spouses accept responsibility, the relationship moves toward a “we win” model of teamwork.

5. Speak respectfully.

Teamwork requires respect. And respect leaves no room for name-calling, stonewalling, sarcastic ridiculing, or manipulation.

Instead, respect will move openly toward someone with positive energy. Respect will remember that sometimes it is more important to be loving than to be right. And respect will give what we expect to receive in return.

In the end, the goal of managing conflict is not to be right. The goal is to grow stronger by listening, loving, and finding a healthy way forward. Compromise is good. In fact, it's better than good; it's wonderful.

But sacrifice can be even greater than compromise. Sacrifice sets faithful Catholic marriages apart from the culture. Selfless love sacrifices for the good of the other. And when both spouses embrace the selfless, sacrificial love embodied in Jesus, the marriage gains a supernatural, divine strength.

Discuss:

What might the following passage of Scripture teach you about handling conflict in your marriage?

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. . . Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. . . Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:26–32)

Video 5.5) Laugh! (4:14) – watch and discuss