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*Listening, learning,
and living together:
it's the science of life.*

Marriage Preparation¹

Donna Davis²

The state of Florida set a precedent in 1998 when the legislature established the Florida Marriage Preparation And Preservation Act of 1998. Hailed as a model for the nation, the law requires couples to read the Family Law Handbook provided by the clerk of the court and gives them the option of taking a four-hour marriage course prior to their nuptials for a discount of \$32.50 on their marriage license. The act was approved by the Florida legislature with the intent of helping couples better understand the commitment of marriage and to improve communication skills among couples. The penalty for not taking the course is a three-day waiting period for a marriage license and full price on the fee. The state also mandated high schools to incorporate marriage instruction as part of the existing required life management skills course.

Does marriage preparation work? Most family researchers believe the answer is yes. Premarital education can slow couples down and foster deliberation. It sends a message that marriage matters, it can help couples learn options if they need help later, and in some cases, it can lower risks for subsequent marital distress or termination.

But critics also argue over the effectiveness of marriage preparation courses, particularly when offered in schools. No one seems to be arguing that premarital education is a good

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idea. But debate remains heated about the "wheres, whens, whys and hows" about premarital education.

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