

1998/99 WASHINGTON MARRIAGE REPORT UPDATE



From this day forward ...

A STATEWIDE LOOK AT THE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS SHAPING
THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IN WASHINGTON.

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One year ago, Washington Family Council took an initial reading on the health and prevalence of marriages and other relationships in the communities of Washington state. Our goal was to paint an accurate picture of what marriage looks like, and to identify the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to its strength and failure.

Today, we can not only look back over the year and evaluate the changes in the marriage picture, we can gain new insight and information that will help chart a future course. So we ask again, what is the marriage forecast for Washington state? What can we do today to strengthen our marriages or prepare for future marriage? What can we do to give young people a vision for what marriage can be for them?

This report highlights new findings from this year's research as well as presenting significant changes from last year's results. Our hope is that the 1998 Washington Marriage Report will help leaders in our society—church pastors, business owners, media messengers, educators, government officials and parents—to be factually equipped to make wise, informed decisions that will have a positive impact on their own marriage, the marriages impacted by their leadership and the institution of marriage itself.

As you read through this report, keep one thing in mind, surveys and polls may reveal popular morality, but they do not determine right and wrong. Transcendent values and moral truths stand independent of human or social opinion.

From the youngest child to the oldest adult, marriage is relevant to everyone and touches everyone's life—in the past, present and future. We all have a role to play in strengthening marriages ... from this day forward.

For families,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Kemp".

Jeff Kemp, Executive Director

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Executive Summary

While our marriage barometer hasn't changed much in one year, only one in five Washington adults believe the outlook will be better in ten years.

Perception is reality. It's a common quip, but does it imply a two-way relationship? If someone's perception shapes what they believe to be reality, can reality be changed by influencing someone's perceptions? Marriages, and other relationships, in Washington have a reality that is immune to popular perceptions. Some are healthy and thriving, some are just getting by, and some are falling apart. But what will these relationships look like tomorrow or ten years from now?

One year ago, nearly two-thirds of Washingtonians believed that the typical marriage was weaker than the typical marriage of thirty years ago. Today, nearly three-quarters of Washington adults believe that the typical marriage will be about the same or weaker another ten years in the future. However, the snapshot of marriage taken by the Marriage Health and Marriage Confidence Indexes show a slight improvement in the behaviors and attitudes that impact the strength of relationships in Washington.



Some of the new findings in this year's research indicate positive attitudes and healthy behaviors that should strengthen marriages and family relationships in years to come. When asked what one life goal was most desirable, over three-quarters of Washington adults choose strong marriages or happy children. And only two percent of Washingtonians would sacrifice a satisfying lifelong marriage before they would give up a nice home, comfortable retirement, fulfilling career or happy children. Marriage and family are clearly of paramount importance to Washington adults.

Marital Health Indicators

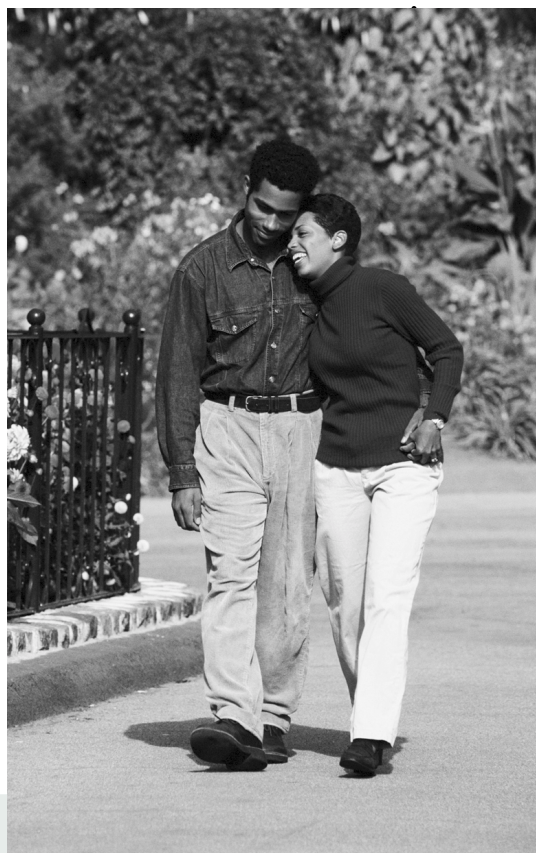
The prevalence of different relationship types in Washington has remained fairly consistent over the past year. Small improvements have occurred in the strength of marriages, and in behaviors-such as premarital counseling-that contribute to the strength of marriage. In addition to a greater percentage of adults participating in premarital counseling, we also found that the average number of sessions attended has increased from 3.6 to 4.6. This could indicate that the quality of the counseling has improved as well as the quantity of attendance.

Marital Confidence Indicators

Very few changes in Washingtonians' confidence in marriage were noted from last year as well. Beliefs about the relevance of the institution of marriage as well as the expectation that it is a lifelong relationship are still strong among adults. One positive change that parallels the increase in premarital counseling participation and the average number of sessions is that more Washington adults believe they had realistic, optimistic expectations when they got married.

New Findings

This year new questions were added to the survey to find out about the importance of different life goals to Washington adults. Mentioned above, the results are presented on pages eight and nine of this report. Research participants were also asked about their attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual involvement before marriage. One-third of adults report that they did not have sex until they were married. Of the 62 percent who said they did engage in sex before marriage, four in ten (41 percent) said that they would save sex for marriage if they had it to do over again. These findings are presented in greater detail on pages 16 and 17.



Marital Health Indicators

	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
Washington state adults who are married	57%	58%
Washington state adults who are divorced	9%	10%
Washington state adults who are cohabiting	5%	4%
Washington state adults who had premarital counseling	33%	35%
Strength of Washington state marriages	70% (9-10)	72% (9-10)
Average strength of Washington state marriages	9.0	9.1

Marital Confidence Indicators

	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
"Marriage is an old fashioned, outmoded institution."	11%	10%
"Marriage should be considered a promise 'til death do us part."	64%	61%
"I expect to be married for life."	94%	93%
"I had optimistic expectations entering marriage."	90%	93%
"... optimistic with little clue what marriage would be like."	24%	20%
"... optimistic with a fairly good clue what marriage would be like."	66%	72%
"All things being equal, it is better for children to be raised in a household that has a married mother and father."	86%	88%

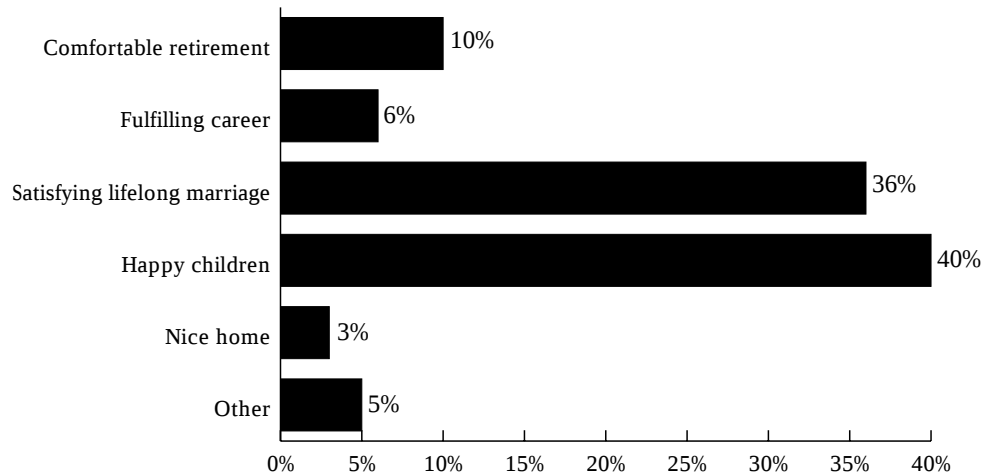
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New Findings

How important is marriage?

Most Desired Life Goals



Every day we are bombarded with messages-things we must have, places we must go, and activities we must do. Some messages are obvious, splashed across billboards in eye-catching colors; other messages are more subtle, dropped in conversations around the water cooler. Of all the things that could bring meaning to life, what do Washington adults value most? Marriage and family.

If Washington adults were given the choice of a nice home, a fulfilling career, a comfortable retirement, happy children, or a satisfying lifelong marriage and guaranteed that they could have one of them, the vast majority (76 percent) of them would choose family. Four in ten adults (40 percent) say they would most want “happy children,” while almost an equal amount (36

percent) desire a “satisfying lifelong marriage.” No more than one in ten adults expressed a preference for any of the other life goals.

◆ Men are more likely than women to choose marriage as their primary desire, while women are more likely to choose happy children (43 percent of men compared to 30 percent of women choose marriage; 50 percent of women compared to 31 percent of men choose happy children).

◆ Single, never married adults are the only subgroup to rank a fulfilling career higher than marriage (27 percent chose the career while 19 percent chose marriage). Married adults are the only group to choose marriage more often than happy children (45 percent chose marriage and 39 percent chose happy children).

◆ Younger adults (18-34) are more likely to select a fulfilling career than middle-age (35-65) adults, while middle-age adults are more likely choose a satisfying lifelong marriage than younger people.



Among these goals, Washington adults say they should be much more willing to sacrifice material comforts than strong family relationships. Over half (52 percent) say they are most willing to give up a nice home, and another three in ten (29 percent) say they would sacrifice a fulfilling career first. Only one in 25 adults (4 percent) believe they should be most willing to sacrifice happy children, and that is twice as many as those who believe a satisfying lifelong marriage should be given up first (2 percent).

◆ While fewer than 10 percent of any subgroup is willing to sacrifice a satisfying lifelong marriage first, young adults are significantly more likely to believe that marriage should be given up than adults older than 35 (8 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds compared to 1 percent of 35- to 49-year-olds and none of those over age 50).

◆ Married parents with children living at home are about twice as likely as single parents to say that

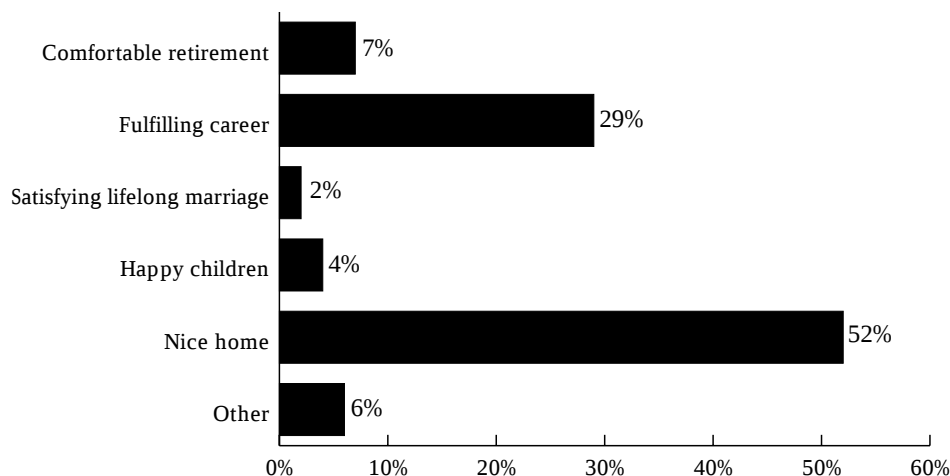
a fulfilling career should be sacrificed first (35 percent of married parents compared to 18 percent of single parents willing to give up a fulfilling career).

◆ Washington adults with no children or only one child are more willing to sacrifice marriage than adults with two or more children (7 percent of those with one child and 4 percent of those with no children, compared to none of the adults with more than one child).

Key finding:

Of several life goals Washington adults could choose from, ideally, a satisfying lifelong marriage is one of the most desired and the last to be sacrificed.

Which of these life goals should a person be most willing to sacrifice?



Where is marriage going?

From “Don’t cry over spilled milk” to “Hindsight is 20/20,” there are many opinions about the value of looking back on past actions and decisions. One year ago, nearly two-thirds of Washington adults believed that the typical present-day marriage was weaker than the typical marriage of thirty years ago. While that doesn’t say much for the quality of marriages today, it does give us great potential for improvement.

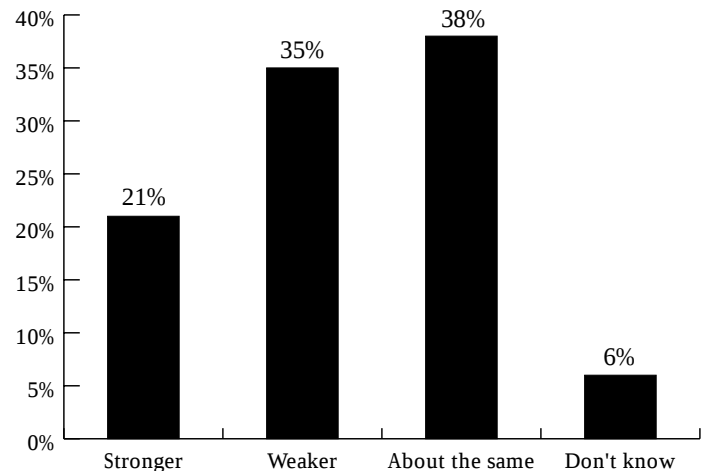
Unfortunately, most Washington adults do not believe we’ll learn from the last thirty years in creating stronger marriages in the near future. Only one in five (21 percent) believe that the typical marriage ten years from now will be stronger than the typical marriage today. More than one-third of adults (35 percent) believe marriages will actually be even weaker in ten years than they are now, and about the same portion (38 percent) believe marriages will be of about the same quality as they are currently.

♦ Adults with a college education are less likely to think marriages will be weaker in ten years than those with only some college or a high school diploma (24

percent of college graduates believe marriages will be weaker compared to 42 percent of those with some college and 37 percent of high school graduates).

♦ Washington adults who say they did not have sex before marriage are significantly more likely to believe marriages will be weaker ten years from now than those who did have sex before marriage (47 percent of adults who did not have premarital sex believe marriage will be weaker compared to 27 percent of those who did have premarital sex). Pages 16 and 17 explore more of the differences associated with sexual behavior choices before marriage.

Predicted quality of marriage in 10 years compared to today



Key finding:

More Washingtonians are looking to churches to strengthen marriages than to any other societal institution.

Marriage is both a personal relationship and a societal institution. Individual marriages each have their own unique characteristics, and yet there are qualities all marriages hold in common and benefits that society reaps from marriage. Just as marriages impact society, different societal institutions are able to impact the quality of marriages. In Washington, the majority of adults (51 percent) believe churches can do the most to promote strong, healthy marriages. Another one-quarter (27 percent) of adults believe extended family can do the most to help strengthen

marriages. Washington adults do not generally look to schools, media, therapists, and government as institutions that can do much to strengthen marriages. Even so, these groups do wield significant influence in daily life and it is important that such influence is positive, not negative, toward marriage.

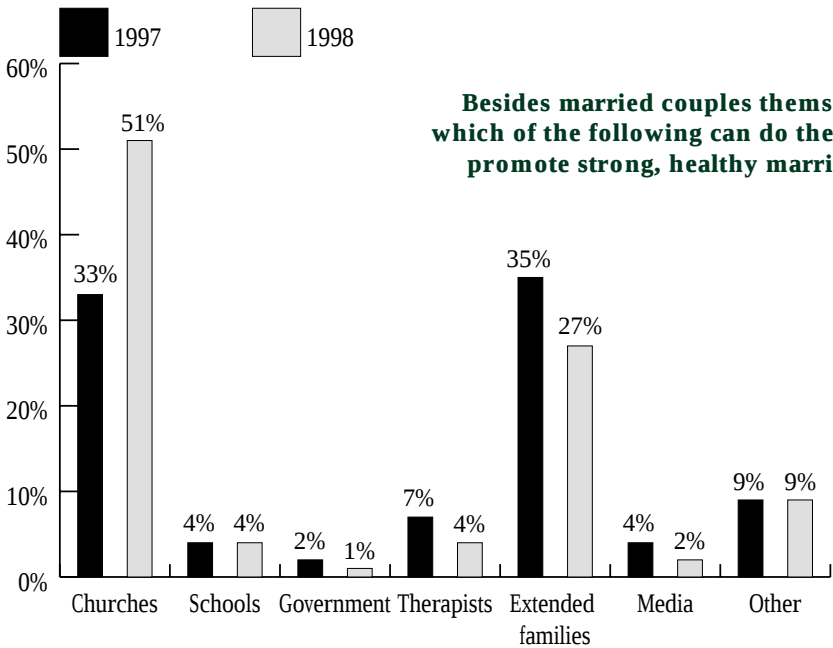
- ◆ Adults over age 50 are more likely to look to churches to strengthen marriage than younger adults (71 percent of 50-64-year-olds and 66 percent of those over 65 compared to 41 percent of 18-49-year-olds).
- ◆ Young adults (18-24) are more likely to look to schools than older adults (13 percent of 18-24-year-olds compared to 1-3 percent of age groups over 25).
- ◆ Eastern Washington residents are more likely to believe churches can do the most to strengthen marriages than Puget Sound area residents are. (65 percent of Spokane area residents compared to 48 percent of Seattle/Tacoma area residents).
- ◆ Adults with two or more children are more likely to select churches while adults with no children or only one child are more likely to believe extended families can do the most to strengthen marriages

How effective can churches be?

If half of the adults in Washington expect churches to be the most effective at strengthening marriages, it would be important for churches to have access to a lot of people in order to have any significant impact. Many findings in this research indicate that, contrary to popular opinion, churches have contact with most adults in Washington.

- ◆ Three-quarters (72 percent) of Washington adults indicate they have a Christian religious preference. About half of all adults (51 percent) identify themselves as “born again” Christians.
- ◆ One in four adults (26 percent) say they attend religious services every week, and another 19 percent say they attend almost every week or a couple times per month. One-third (34 percent) of Washingtonians say they attend services a few times a year. Only 20 percent of Washington’s adult population never attends a religious service.
- ◆ Marriage may be the occasion that gives the church the greatest opportunity to connect with people as eight in ten (79 percent) adults in Washington are married by a minister.

(59 percent of adults with 2+ children compared to 37 percent of those with no children or one child said churches; 35 percent of adults with no children or one child said extended families compared to 21 percent of adults with 2+ children).



Besides married couples themselves, which of the following can do the most to promote strong, healthy marriages?

Cohabitation: an attempt to “practice” marriage?

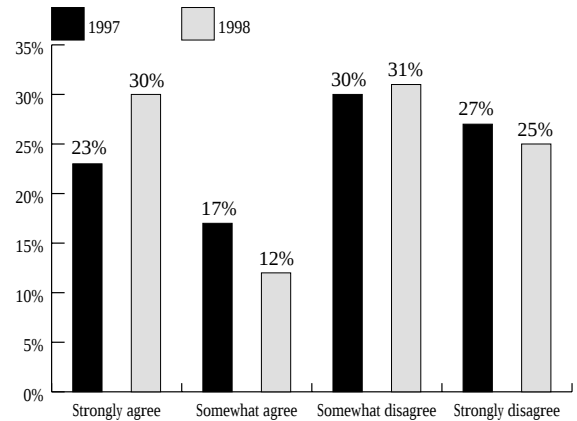
Is marriage just about a piece of paper? If not, what is the difference between a cohabiting relationship and a marriage relationship? Maybe couples who opt for cohabitation over marriage are rejecting the “traditional” institution, or maybe they claim to view marriage as so important that it is necessary to “make sure” a potential mate is compatible before walking down the aisle. In either case, researchers are finding that cohabitation before marriage negatively impacts the success of subsequent marriages (see *Why Marriage Matters*, by Glenn T. Stanton, chap. 2 for a summary).

What do Washington adults believe about cohabitation? There are mixed feelings about whether a couple living together before marriage is a good or bad idea in general. But when the situation is closer to home, more adults seem to feel that cohabitation is not a desirable option.

Only four in ten (42 percent) Washington adults agree with the statement, “It is a bad idea for couples to live together before they are married.” Just over half (56 percent) disagree with this statement. However, when they are asked what they would want for their children, more than three in four (76 percent) Washington parents say they hope their children will someday get married. Fourteen percent hope their children cohabit and then marry someday, and only one parent in 300 hopes their children will live with someone without getting married.

◆ Older adults are more likely to agree that cohabiting before marriage is a bad idea than younger adults (50 percent of adults 35 and older agree compared to 25 percent of adults ages 18-34; 71 percent of 18-34-year-olds disagree compared to 50 percent of those

“It’s a bad idea for couples to live together before they are married.”

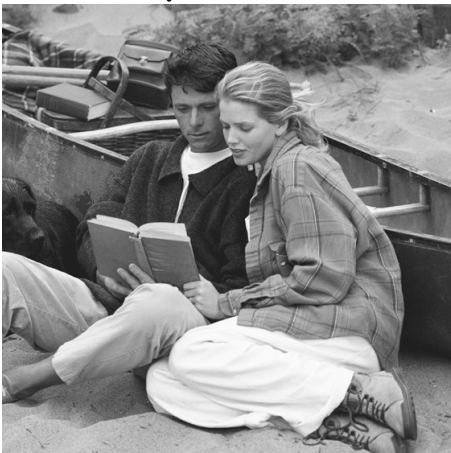


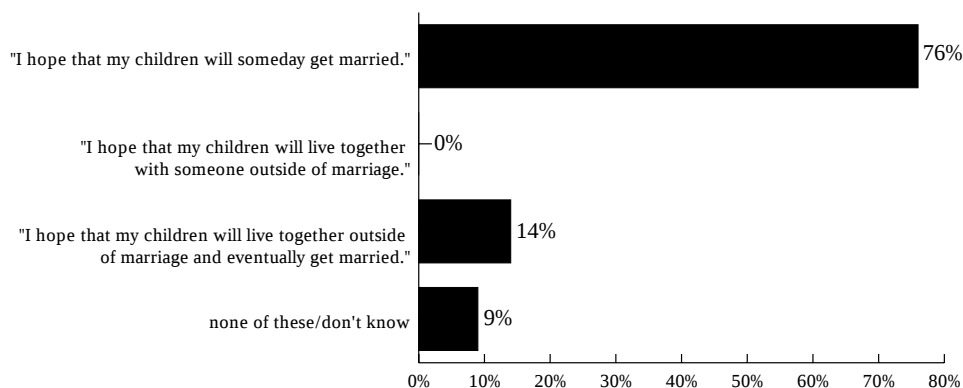
35 and older). Within each group, individuals are more likely to feel strongly about their agreement or disagreement than to have responded with “somewhat” agreement or disagreement.

◆ Married adults are more likely to agree with this idea than single adults (48 percent agreement among married adults compared to 32 percent agreement among singles). The difference between older married adults and younger married adults is even greater (44 percent of married 35-49-year-olds and 65 percent of those 50 and older agree compared to only 25 percent of married 18-34-year-olds).

◆ Religious behavior has a significant impact on the likelihood of agreeing with this idea. Adults who identified themselves as Christians and those who report praying with their spouse and attending church on a frequent basis are more likely to agree that cohabitation is a bad idea (50 percent of Christians agree compared to 22 percent of non-Christians; 75 percent of those who pray together daily and 52 percent of those who pray together infrequently compared to 34 percent of those who never pray together agree; 65 percent of regular church attenders compared to 34 percent of infrequent attenders and 21 percent of those who never attend agree).

◆ Adults who are currently married are more likely to hope their children get married someday, without cohabiting, than currently divorced adults (82 percent of married





parents compared to 66 percent of divorced adults). Divorced adults are significantly more likely to hope their children cohabit and then marry (23 percent of divorced parents compared to 11 percent of married parents).

◆ Though parents who have ever cohabited themselves are significantly more likely to hope their children cohabit before marrying (26 percent of parents who have cohabited compared to 8 percent of those who have not), the substantial majority (67 percent) hope that their children get married and do not cohabit.

Just fewer than one in three (31 percent) Washington adults say they have been in a cohabiting relationship outside of marriage at some point in their lives, while only four percent are currently cohabiting.

◆ A history of cohabitation is significantly related to many divorce behaviors that were measured in this research. Currently, divorced adults are more likely to have cohabited than currently married adults (53 percent of divorced adults compared to 27 percent of married adults). Forty percent of adults who have ever been divorced have cohabited, which is significantly greater than the 25 percent of never-divorced adults who

have cohabited. Adults whose parents divorced have cohabited more often than those whose parents did not divorce (42 percent versus 27 percent). Half (50 percent) of the adults who say they have considered getting divorced have cohabited compared to one-quarter (24 percent) of those who have not considered divorce.

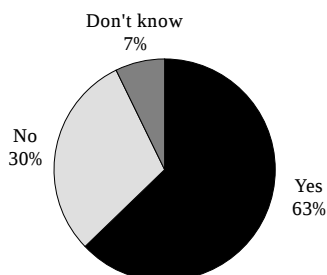
◆ Among adults who have cohabited, there seems to be a higher frequency of conflict in their current marriages. Adults who have cohabited are more likely to say they argue monthly with their spouse, while never-cohabiters are more likely to say they argue rarely. (Those who have cohabited are 37 percent of the "monthly" arguers and only 22 percent of those who argue "rarely," while never-cohabiters make up 72 percent of those who argue "rarely".)

◆ Married parents are less likely to have cohabited than single parents (30 percent of married parents compared to 72 percent of single parents).

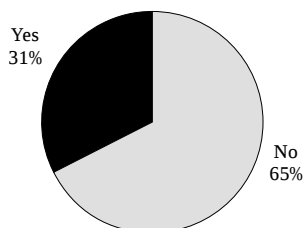
◆ Younger adults are more likely to have cohabited than older adults (30 percent of 18-24-year-olds and 43 percent of 25-49-year-olds compared to 21 percent of adults ages 50-64 and 5 percent of those 65 and older).

Key finding:
Washington adults express mixed feelings about the benefit of cohabitation in general, but it's not something they want for their children.

Do you plan to marry your significant other?



Have you cohabited?



What makes marriage successful?

Washington state adults are rating the strength of their current relationships about the same as they did one year ago. Two-thirds of adults (67 percent) who are currently married, separated, engaged or living with a significant other rate the strength of their relationship as a 9 or 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. The average relationship strength is an 8.9. There are, however, significant differences between subgroups that have made different behavioral choices.

♦ Adults ages 65 and older are more likely to rate their relationships stronger than younger adults (9.7 average for 65+ adults compared to average ratings of 8.8 for 50-64-year-olds, 8.5 for 35-49-year-olds, 9.0 for 25-34-year-olds, and 8.8 for 18-24-year-olds).

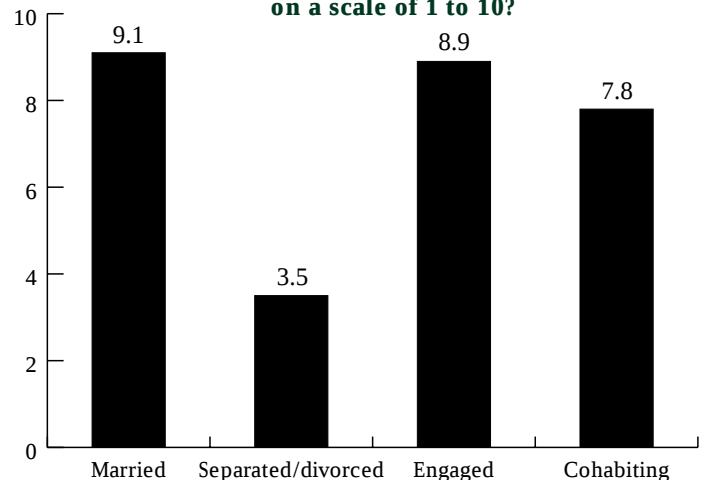
♦ There are noticeable differences in the strength of different relationship types. Married adults have an average 9.1, separated adults have an average 3.5, and cohabiting adults have an average 7.8 rating.

♦ Wives and mothers who work full time rated their relationships of lower strength than those who do not work or work only

part time (full-time employed wives had an average 8.5 compared to non-employed wives' average 9.4; full-time employed moms had an average 8.4, significantly lower than both part-time employed moms (9.2) and non-employed moms (9.4)).

♦ Individuals who report abstaining from sex before marriage rated their current relationships higher on average than those who did have sex before marriage (9.4 compared to 8.5).

How strong is your relationship on a scale of 1 to 10?



♦ Adults who pray together daily with their spouse rated their marriages stronger than those who never pray with their spouse (9.3 compared to 8.7).

♦ Washington state adults who have never cohabited rated their current relationships significantly stronger than those who have cohabited at some time (9.2 compared to 8.3).

Key finding:

Married adults rate the strength of their relationship and their sexual satisfaction significantly higher than individuals in other types of relationships.

Sexual satisfaction is also a measure of relationship success. Last year's research found that lifelong commitment, good communication, fidelity, strong religious faith, and sexual satisfaction are key influences in how an individual rates the strength of his or her own marriage. This is consistent with the findings this year that people who rate the strength of their relationship as a 9 or 10 also rate their sexual satisfaction significantly higher than

those who rate the strength of their relationship as a 6 to 8 (average sexual satisfaction of 8.6 among those rating their relationship strength a 9-10 compared to an average 7.4 among the 6 to 8 group). The average sexual satisfaction rating among Washington adults is 7.7 on a 10-point scale.

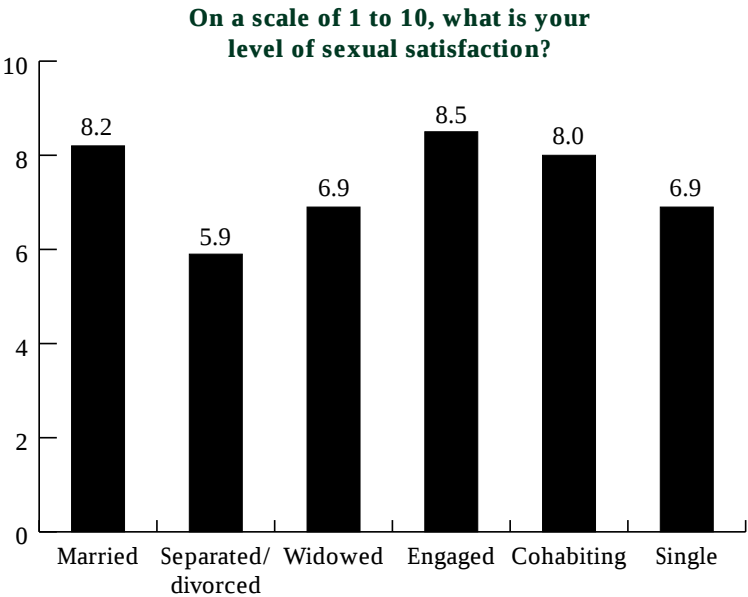
- ◆ Married adults have a higher average sexual satisfaction rating than sexually-active single adults (8.2 compared to 6.9).
- ◆ Married parents report higher sexual satisfaction than single parents (8.3 compared to 6.2).
- ◆ Wives and mothers who are employed part-time report a higher average sexual satisfaction than those who are employed full time (average 8.9 for part-time employed wives compared to 7.8 among full-time employed wives; 8.8 average among part-time employed moms compared to 7.5 average among full-time employed moms and 7.8 average among non-employed moms).
- ◆ Adults with children report significantly higher sexual satisfaction than those without children (average 7.9 among adults with children compared to 7.2 average among those without kids).
- ◆ Couples who participated in premarital counseling report higher sexual satisfaction than those who did not (8.3 compared to 7.4).

Premarital counseling starts marriages off right

Though only one-third of Washington adults who have been married participated in premarital counseling prior to the wedding, the vast majority of those who did found it helpful.

- ◆ Thirty-five percent of adults who have been married participated in premarital counseling before their wedding. They participated in an average of 4.6 sessions of counseling, which is one session more than the 1997 average of 3.6 sessions.
- ◆ Thirty percent found the counseling “very helpful” and about half of all participants found the counseling “somewhat helpful.”
- ◆ Individuals who have been divorced are more likely to say they did not participate in premarital counseling than those who have not been divorced (76 percent of ever-divorced people did not have counseling compared to 54 percent of those who have never divorced).
- ◆ Couples married by a minister or rabbi are significantly more likely to have participated in premarital counseling than those married by a justice of the peace (95 percent of those married by a JOP did not have counseling compared to 53 percent of those married by a minister or rabbi).

- ◆ Individuals who did not engage in premarital sex report higher sexual satisfaction than those who did have sex before marriage do (8.3 compared to 7.4).



Sex and marriage

Sex pervades our culture, and yet it is increasingly disassociated from marriage. The idea that sexual activity should be saved for marriage would probably be labeled “old-fashioned” by most, and yet many Washington adults still hold that belief as a societal, if not personal, standard. Two-thirds (66 percent) of Washington adults believe “Couples should wait to have sex until they are married,” while less than three in ten (29 percent) believe “Young people should have sexual experience before they are married.”

♦ Women are more likely to believe sex belongs in marriage alone than men (76 percent of women agree compared to 56 percent of men).

♦ Married adults are more likely to agree that couples should wait for marriage than single adults (72 percent of married adults compared to 54 percent of single, never married adults agree).

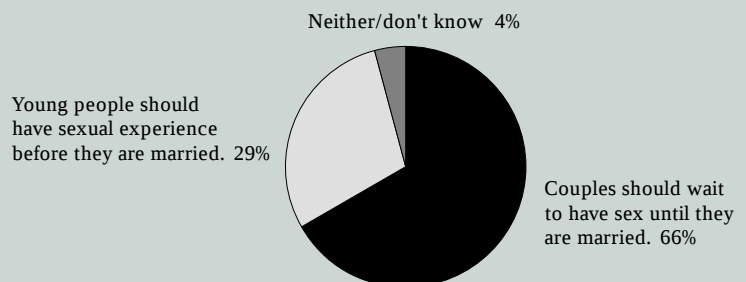
♦ Individuals who said they were sexually active before they were married are more likely than those who were not to say young people should get sexual experience before marriage (36 percent of those who had premarital sex compared to 7 percent of those who did not said sexual experience before marriage was preferable), but the majority (58 percent) of those who themselves had sex before marriage said they now believe that couples should wait for marriage.

♦ Eastern Washington residents are more likely to believe that couples should save sex for marriage than people living in western Washington (77 percent of those living in the Spokane area and 82 percent of those living in the Yakima/Tri-Cities area selected this belief compared to 62 percent of those living in the Puget Sound area).

Washington adults were asked if they, personally, engaged in sex before marriage. If they said they had, they were also asked if they had it to do over again, would they have sex before marriage or save sex for marriage. Just more than six in ten adults (62 percent) say they had sex before marriage. However, 41 percent of those people say they would save sex for marriage if they could make that choice again.

Key Finding:

Marriage relationships are rated stronger by those who deferred sex until marriage.



◆ Men are more likely than women to have engaged in sex before marriage (72 percent of men compared to 53 percent of women report having had premarital sex).

◆ Adults who are currently divorced are more likely to have had premarital sex than those who are currently married (84 percent of those currently divorced compared to 58 percent of those currently married).

◆ Younger married adults are more likely to report premarital sexual activity than older married adults (84 percent of 18-34-year-old marrieds and 73 percent of 35-49-year-old marrieds compared to 30 percent of married adults over age 50 say they had premarital sex).

◆ Premarital sexual activity is significantly higher among people who say they have considered getting a divorce than it is among those who have not considered divorcing their current spouse (77 percent of those who have considered divorce compared to 57 percent of those who have not).

◆ Adults who did not have sex before marriage are more likely to rate the strength of their current relationships as a

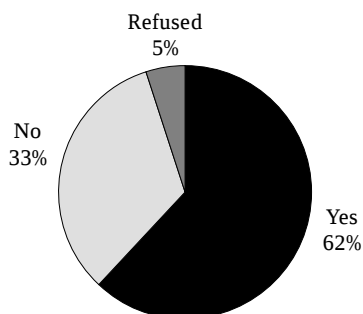
9 or 10, and those who did have sex before marriage are more likely to rate their current relationships as weaker. While only 33 percent of the total survey sample said they did not have sex before marriage, they made up 43 percent of those who rated their current relationship a 10 and 39 percent of those who rated their relationship a 9 or 10. On the other hand, the 62 percent of the population that says they had sex before marriage make up 100 percent of those rating their current relationship a 1 to 5 and 70 percent of those who rate the strength of their relationship as a 6 to 8. Simply put, marriage relationships are rated stronger by those who deferred sex until marriage.

◆ People who have children are more likely to say they would save sex for marriage if they had it to do over again than those without children. (Among adults who had sex before marriage, 47 percent of those with kids say they would save sex for marriage compared to 18 percent of those without kids.)

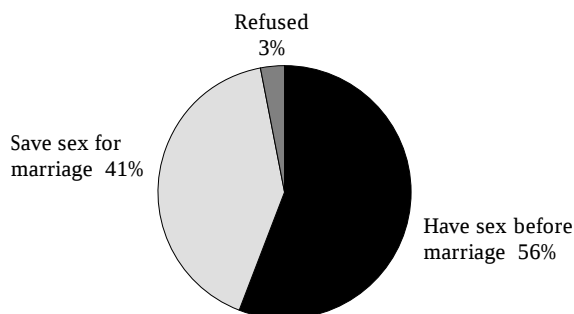
Key finding:

One-third of Washington adults saved sex for marriage, and 41 percent of those who didn't wish they had.

Did you engage in sex before marriage?



Ideally, if you had to do it over again, would you have sex before marriage or not?



Divorce and the law

On the whole, Washington state adults do not look to government for the answers to building healthy relationships. Only one percent of adults said that government could do the most, besides a married couple themselves, to strengthen marriages in Washington. However, one thing Washingtonians do seem to expect from government is justice. In two different scenarios, only one in five adults (21 percent) said government should allow an individual to break a public

commitment without facing some sort of penalty.

Current Washington state law provides no recourse for an individual when their spouse files for a divorce. Yet only 21 percent of Washington adults agree that this should be the case. When asked how the law should treat a person who wants a divorce when their spouse wants to preserve the marriage, just more than one-third of adults (34 percent) believe the divorce should not be allowed unless the

spouse has been abusive, unfaithful, or has abandoned the marriage. An additional one in four (26 percent) believe that, while the divorce should be allowed, the spouse who wants out should “pay a price” for leaving.

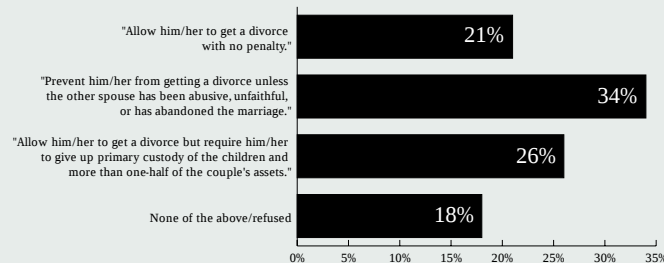
♦ Caucasian respondents are more likely to believe there should be no penalty than those adults who are ethnic minorities (23 percent of white adults compared to 10 percent of minority adults).

♦ Adults who have been married less than six years are more likely to believe that the divorce should be allowed without penalty than those who have been married more than six years (40 percent of those married less than six years

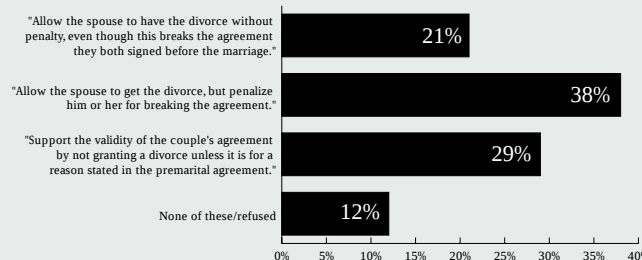
compared to 20 percent of those married 6-10 years and 18 percent of those married 11 or more years).

Washington adults were also asked to assess a hypothetical situation where a couple signs an agreement prior to marriage that states conditions under which their marriage could dissolve. If one spouse later wanted to leave the marriage, but not for the reasons outlined in their mutual agreement, nearly three in ten (29 percent) adults believe the law should not grant a divorce. Almost four in ten (38 percent)

Consider a situation in which one spouse wants to get a divorce, but the other wants to try to and work thing out and stay together. How do you think the law ought to treat the spouse who wants to get a divorce?



Consider a situation where, before getting married, a man and a woman sign an agreement that they will only get divorced under certain circumstances. Years later, one spouse wants a divorce, but not for any of the reasons agreed to before the marriage. How do you think the law should treat the spouse who wants the divorce?



Key finding:

Only one in five Washington state adults believe that current divorce law is appropriate.

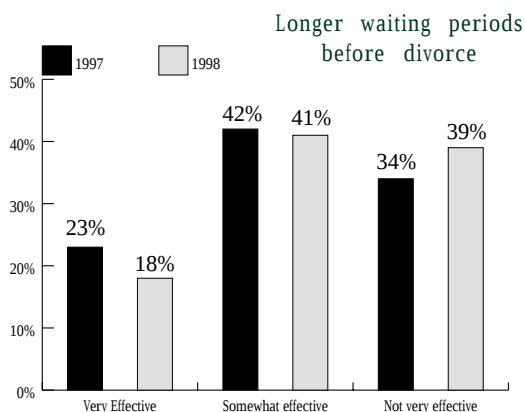
believe that the divorce should be allowed, but the person should be penalized for breaking the agreement. Only 21 percent believe the agreement should be ignored.

♦ Again, white respondents are more likely to believe there should be no penalty than minority respondents (23 percent of white adults compared to 11 percent of minority adults).

♦ Younger adults (18-49) are more likely to believe that the divorce should be allowed but the person breaking the agreement should be penalized than older adults (43 percent of 18-49-year-old adults compared to 24 percent of adults 65 and older).

Washingtonians' evaluation of the potential effectiveness of various legal efforts to strengthen marriage also reflect a general attitude that something needs to be done, but government may not be the most effective entity to strengthen marriages. A majority of adults believe that any of three potential reforms - mandatory pre-divorce counseling, longer waiting periods before divorce, or incentives to participate in premarital counseling - would be effective in strengthening marriages. However, most adults believe these reforms would be only somewhat effective.

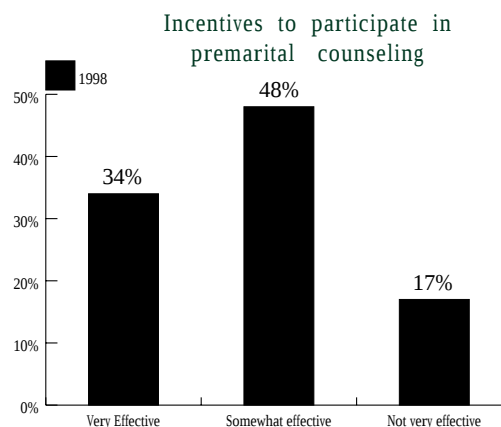
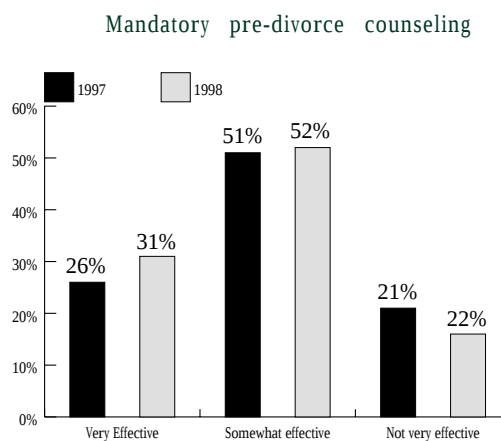
♦ Mandatory pre-divorce counseling and incentives to participate in premarital counseling are seen as most likely to be effective by Washington adults. Over eighty percent of adults believe laws that accomplish these two things would be effective in strengthening Washington marriages.



1998 Legislative Attempts to Strengthen Marriage

During the 1998 legislative session, two bills were introduced in the state senate that aimed to strengthen marriages in Washington state. Both bills were heard in committee, but neither came to the floor for a vote.

- ♦ **SB 6193-Divorce Reform:** This bill proposed changes to the divorce process that would have allowed a judge to require pre-divorce counseling and impose a longer waiting period before a divorce was granted when compelling reasons to end the marriage quickly do not exist. In specific circumstances (abuse, incarceration, abandonment, and some others), it allows the court to grant a divorce more quickly than current law allows.
- ♦ **SB 6135-Covenant Marriage:** This legislation creates two options for couples seeking a marriage license. Couples who choose a covenant marriage license would agree to participate in premarital counseling, seek counseling if their marriage had problems and only divorce under specific circumstances.



Recommendations

This research has identified several attitudes and behaviors that will improve the health of, and confidence in, the institution of marriage for Washington state.

Implementing some of these strategies will help Washingtonians strengthen the institution of marriage for individual benefit, as well as for the benefit of future generations...from this day forward.

From this day forward, individuals can help strengthen marriage by...

- ◆ Make your marriage and family relationships a priority. Trade TV time for meaningful conversation. Renew your marriage vows...in private or in public. Set aside regular time for “dates” with your spouse.
- ◆ Take stock of your personal priorities and choices, and how they impact the past, present and future health of your important relationships. Specifically, give your marriage the best chance for success by saving sex for marriage and not cohabiting outside of marriage.
- ◆ Be a role model for healthy relationship choices in your sphere of influence. Consider mentoring a younger married couple or single adult. Share your experiences with them, and learn from their insights and perspective. Your local church may offer a program that trains and uses mentors in this way.

From this day forward, extended family can help strengthen marriages by...

- ◆ Be supportive of the marriages in your family. Celebrate anniversaries. Share stories of relationship growth experiences and successes.

◆ Make sure the children and young adults in your family see positive examples of marriage and healthy relationships. Grandparents, aunts and uncles may have wonderful stories to share.

From this day forward, churches can help strengthen marriages by...

- ◆ Teach about the uniqueness and importance of the institution of marriage. Encourage and equip people to meet high standards of commitment, fidelity, honesty and accountability in their relationships.
- ◆ Require marriage preparation of all couples getting married in your church. Network with other churches in your community to provide premarital counseling, inventories and marriage mentoring.
- ◆ Recognizing that couples will go through struggles in their marriage, provide instruction and counseling in conflict resolution. Encourage couples who have experienced hard times and worked through them to mentor couples who are struggling.

From this day forward, the community can help strengthen marriages by...

- ◆ In the media, portray marriage as the positive and healthy relationship that it is for the majority of people. Don't unrealistically

glamorize divorce in programming, advertising and news coverage. Make sure the picture of reality that is created by media is truly reflective of “real life.”

◆ In education, present accurate information to students about the psychological, emotional, and physical health benefits of marriage. Provide positive examples of marriage to students, since some may not see marriage modeled at home. Include parents in the decision about what their children are taught about marriage, sexuality and family life.

◆ In business, recognize that employees are husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, and members of extended families even while they are at work. Make efforts to minimize the time an employee spends away from his or her family by exploring flex-time options, reducing overtime, and cutting back on work-related travel when possible. Model the importance of putting family priorities first, and honor employees who follow your example.

From this day forward, government can help strengthen marriages by...

◆ Evaluate current divorce law and explore ways to ensure that there is justice, protection and a respect for the marriage commitment in divorce proceedings. Explore the possible effectiveness of longer waiting periods, pre-divorce counseling, and incentives to participate in premarital counseling.

◆ Let the marriage license application be a teacher. Offer information about the importance of premarital counseling and the resources available to every couple that applies for a marriage license. Consider reviewing the length of time a marriage license is valid for to encourage couples to take advantage of the premarital counseling information they receive when they apply for the license (perhaps a license that couldn't be used for a month and is valid for up to six months).



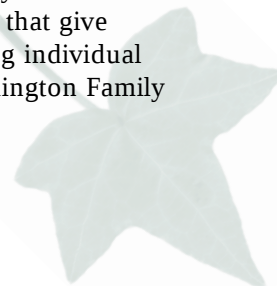
◆ Adopt the standard that all legislation and policies must “first, do no harm” to the strength and integrity of marriages and families. Examine all legislation for its impact on marriage and family.

◆ Recognize the importance and benefit to children of being raised by a married mother and father.

◆ Do not let partisan rhetoric and divisions prevent honest and thoughtful discussion about the state of families and the specific steps government can take to improve the environment for marriage and family in this state.

◆ Legislators, and the Governor, should use their public leadership to encourage the private and community efforts that are underway to strengthen marriage in many cities across the state.

For more information about any of these recommendations or resources that give information about strengthening individual marriages, please contact Washington Family Council.



Methodology

Wirthlin Worldwide, a Virginia-based, international research firm, performed all data collection and data analysis related to the original research presented in this report. Their methodology is reported as follows.

“This study contains results from a sample of 400 adults in Washington who are at least 18 years of age or older. This sample was stratified by region according to the census population data. In addition, the sample was compared to the 1997 benchmark data and validated according to gender, age, and educational attainment to ensure accurate representation of the state’s adult population. The margin of error for a sample size of 400 is ± 4.9 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Interviews in Washington were conducted during evening and weekend hours from August 17th to August 25th, 1998.”

Any variation in reported percentages of ± 1 percentage point within this report is due only to rounding. Answers may not total 100% due to some respondents refusing to answer some questions.

About Washington Family Council

Washington Family Council is a nonprofit communication, research and education organization working to strengthen the family through cultural change and improved public policy. Washington Family Council is uniquely positioned to multiply its efforts by networking with various leaders in the state who can help change hearts and attitudes about the importance of family. The following are four areas in which WFC has strategically determined to work with leaders to improve family life in Washington state.

1. Community

Networking people together and building bridges between people in our state is an essential part of WFC's work. In WFC's constituent services department, staff members are dedicated to connecting people with the resources, information and organizations they need to handle family or community concerns. WFC has also started Marriage Builders, which seeks to bring local-level action and concern to strengthening marriages. And WFC joins and serves churches and service organizations that seek opportunities to help people in times of crisis and economic hardship. WFC is also networking with schools and community organizations to implement abstinence education.

2. Public Policy

Although public policy cannot solve society's ills, it can uphold principles that make a society stronger. WFC encourages policy makers to choose to make family the primary

consideration in their decisions. The Family Issues Guide is a tool WFC created and distributed to all state legislators. It includes case studies, practical analysis and talking points on family-related issues. WFC also publishes the Community Impact Bulletin, a newsletter that highlights current events that impact families.

3. Media

Mass media has the ability to highlight and shape the issues of the day. But the treatment given to those issues is not one that resonates with many families. Through letters to various editors, editorials, speaking to reporters and producing public service announcements, WFC is able to send a message that does ring true to families. WFC also introduces the media to news stories by writing its own articles about issues often missed by the mainstream press. Through publications like Washington Citizen, press releases and guest editorials, WFC is informing families about important issues.

4. Business

Employers have the opportunity to empower employees to strengthen their families, while improving business productivity. This is the message WFC Executive Director Jeff Kemp has brought to more than 1500 Rotarians and other business leaders around the state. Kemp urges business people to help employees make family a priority, asking them to lead by example. WFC also provides packets of information, showing how business leaders in small and large corporations can implement family-friendly policies in the workplace.

Resources available from Washington Family Council:

1997 Washington Marriage Report (suggested donation \$10)

A complete look at marriage in the state of Washington from premarital counseling and family-of-origin behaviors to activities that married couples share that strengthen their marriage, this 40-page booklet supplements the information highlighted in this report.

1998 Family Time Report (suggested donation \$10)

A statewide look at the attitudes and activities impacting the quantity and quality of family time in Washington, this report was released in August 1998.

Family Issues Guide (suggested donation \$15)

A tool for public policy makers and interested citizens, this notebook contains information, anecdotes and research on ten family issues. Designed for and distributed to all state legislators two years ago, this resource will be updated and republished this fall.

Regular Publications:

Washington Citizen—a monthly magazine that highlights issues and events impacting Washington families.

Community Impact Bulletin—a newsletter briefing interested citizens on public policy issues on a regular basis (weekly during the legislative session).

Washington Family Council

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