



Understanding Your Other Half & the Journey of Marriage

Background Paper

The challenge of relationship and family breakdown

Much is made in current times of the challenges facing us regarding climate change, fuel prices, food inflation and the overall sustainability of our lifestyles. Governments, businesses and households face difficult dilemmas regarding short term and long term financial, social and environmental priorities.

Another equally serious challenge staring us in the face is much closer to home and much more within our control. Yet it receives scant attention in the media or in our social discourse. I refer to the widespread confusion and cynicism surrounding gender relations, and the ongoing high rate of relationship and family breakdown.

Approximately half of all marriages end in divorce and it is likely that a higher number of de-facto relationships end in separation.

The consequences - the obvious and the not-so-obvious

The consequences for the children are well documented. They are at higher risk of poorer social, educational, psychological and relationship outcomes.

However, there is much less acknowledgement of the consequences for the men and women involved. As any relationship counsellor will tell you, relationship pain and breakdown is all too common. An increasing number of men and women are choosing to live alone or enter de-facto relationships while retaining separate premises and escape clauses, and the birth rate in Australia is at an all time low.

This is not about blaming or shaming anybody. This situation is the result of a combination of factors which have combined to undermine our primary relationships, particularly marriage and family life. Neither is this simply about individual personalities or relationship dynamics, although these are important. It is also about gender differences, social norms, financial pressures and social stresses.

A quick scan of the media and the advertising industry suggests that our main concerns are crime and punishment, money, property, consumer goods, sport, leisure and the salacious scandals surrounding those in public life. Our day to day relationships receive scant attention in the media and in our social discourse. Most of us pay more attention to our rubbish and recycling arrangements than we do to our domestic relationships.

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Addressing the challenge

Relationships are like gardens – take them for granted and they will die; tend them - get to know each species and their needs in the different seasons - and they will thrive.

In the past, marriage and family life was a relatively simple contract. These days, our expectations are much higher, the pressures on marriage and family life are more complex, and the confusion about how to be as men and women has increased.

The good news is that we now know so much more about gender differences and relationship dynamics. Now is the time to resource ourselves for what is probably the greatest challenge we set ourselves – how to maintain self, the other and the relationship.

We don't let somebody drive a car until they've had lessons and passed the required tests, and if we commit serious breaches of the traffic code we lose our licence. However, we can enter and end relationships without having to do any preparation or reflection.

We don't hesitate to call out a plumber if the hot water system breaks down but many of us are reluctant to seek specialist relationship help, or inform ourselves properly when the relationship is in difficulty.

Workshop details

This one-day workshop for men and women will address the following common questions and issues:

- Me, You and Us – you and your relationship, its cycles, seasons and needs; the pressures on relationships and what you can do about them;
- Brain-Sex – how the genders are wired differently, what your partner needs from you and how to get your message across;
- Normal Marital Ambivalence – the common difficulties couples face and how these can be better handled; and
- Your questions and areas of concern.

For more information and registration forms see attached, or go to www.noelgiblett.com.au or email noel@noelgiblett.com.au or call 0431 848 835.



Noel Giblett (BA, BSW, MAASW Acc) is a Medicare accredited Individual and Relationship Counsellor in private practice. He has been counselling men and couples for twenty-five years. He is the former manager and supervisor of a not-for-profit counselling service and the author of several articles on men's issues and marriage.