

## Praise for Sandra L. Ceren's books

“...couples can benefit from the extraordinary case studies and quizzes and questionnaires that make up the meat and potatoes of this book. Her books can be read by both the therapist and the clients. Rather than keeping technique and wisdom a secret, she puts everything out in an easy framework so that all can benefit.”

—Barbara Becker Holstein, PhD,  
Author of *Enchanted Self: A Positive Therapy*

“The case studies dealing with personality disorders and doomed relationships are especially significant in building a long-term relationship resulting in marriage. I particularly appreciated the case studies which illustrated key and lasting, inflexible personality basics that form patterns not easily broken.”

—Richard Blake, *Reader Views*

“Drawing upon many years of experience working with couples, Dr. Ceren illuminates essential relationship skills and destructive habits in need of change. Quizzes, real-life stories, and specific scripts facilitate rapid understanding of problems and practical solutions.”

—Holly A. Hunt, Ph.D.  
Author of *Essentials of Private Practice: Streamlining Costs, Procedures, and Policies for Less Stress*

“Dr. Ceren shares her forty years of experience in helping couples to reduce and prevent relationship problems before committing to marriage. The book is a remarkable roadmap to a healthy relationship and insight into self, written by a therapist who combines experience and skill in improving the lives of others.”

—Rosalee G. Weiss, Ph.D., Diplomate,  
American Board of Psychological Specialties

## **Other Works by Sandra L. Ceren**

*Essentials of Premarital Counseling: Creating Compatible Couples (2008)*

*Secrets From the Couch (2002)*

*Prescription For Terror (1999)*

Learn more about Dr. Ceren, read blog postings, and the latest news at [www.DrSandraLevyCeren.com](http://www.DrSandraLevyCeren.com)

*Look Before You Leap*  
*a Premarital Guide for Couples*

*Sandra L. Ceren, PhD.*

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**L o v i n g   H e a l i n g   P r e s s**

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# 1

## What It Takes To Make A Good Marriage



So you're thinking about getting married. If you're a woman, you've probably combed through countless bridal magazines for the perfect dress, but have you really looked carefully to make sure that your intended is as right for you as that designer gown?

Just as you wouldn't buy a car or a house without first doing a little research, you certainly don't want to buy into a marriage before you're sure your partner is the right one for you. You want to avoid a stressful relationship that could nibble away at your self-esteem and cause serious problems along the way. You prefer the nourishment a satisfying marriage can provide.

The wisdom gleaned from many years treating distressed couples led me to develop materials to determine emotional readiness for marriage, compatibility, and willingness to resolve conflicts. These materials, which have been incorporated into this book, contain in-depth personality and relationship quizzes, a list of typical situations couples confront and effective communication and conflict resolution skills applicable to personal and professional life.

Several years ago, over seventy couples seeking pre-marital counseling utilized these materials. Fifty-six couples ranging in age from mid-twenties to mid-forties responded to a five year follow up survey. That the majority of couples returned the survey is significant and beyond expectation. Of the fifty-six couples, forty decided to marry. Thirty-three couples in this

group remain in satisfactory marriages (82.5% success rate) They gave excellent ratings to the materials and the counseling experience.

Of the seven remaining couples who married, two divorced and five are in unstable marriages. All regretted not heeding the warning signs. Seven individuals stated they valued the program and materials and used what they had learned to select more appropriate mates.

In the following chapters, you'll find instructions for the quizzes followed by a discussion of significant responses.

Included are a variety of situations that many couples confront. Imagining yourself in the situations presented will help you to learn how you and your partner would likely respond to an actual event. Taking time to review similar occasions in your past will help you discover your coping styles—what worked and what didn't work. You may find a difference in how you'd handle a situation now as compared to how you responded to a similar situation in the past. This reflects your growth.

It takes time to learn if you are suited for one another. Marriages made too hastily may prove risky. Ideally, having time to experience a variety of situations together will be telling. It is time well spent in gathering important information to reflect upon.

From time to time, it is normal for conflict to occur in every relationship. Therefore, using the situations presented in this book, you will attempt to reach mutually agreeable solutions as you practice the conflict resolution skills provided in the chapter.

Occasional arguments or disagreements may be unpleasant, but they are usual and healthy. Two people can't always agree. Asserting a viewpoint is better than closing up and not being oneself. You can offer each other a fresh perspective, as long as you are willing to listen to each other. Heated debates can be intellectually exciting and instructive as long as they don't create chaos and no one plays bully.

Because a "Don't ask" policy does not work in intimate relationships you must share your answers to the quizzes with each other. Sharing your responses to the quizzes can actually create deeper intimacy. Intimates know each other as fully as possible. It's comforting to be understood.

The qualities that help make for a successful union should be considered of primary importance. Identifying them inside yourself will show whether you are emotionally ready for marriage—for a lifetime with that special person in whose company you feel most comfortable.

Opposites may attract. Opposites may compliment, but similarities can provide mutual understanding. For example, it is difficult to complain to someone who is often tardy when you are, too. When two people have similar problems they can support each other in their efforts to overcome them.

Physical attraction, companionship, fear of not finding another mate in the future, motivation to have a family life, or economic improvement are compelling reasons for wanting to marry, but they aren't enough. You want a good marriage, one that provides contentment and stability and allows each of you to

reach your own potential, offering comfort when things outside the marriage aren't going well.

People choose to marry for all the wonderful, positive aspects that a marriage can bring. A list of important qualities required for making a good marriage follows below:

### **Qualities of a Good Relationship**

You must feel safe and satisfied in being together. Pausing to question these feelings may be a warning sign of trouble ahead.

You must be able to share deeply from the heart, to feel truly yourself with your mate, to feel assured that you are accepted as you are, not as someone you pretend to be, or someone your mate imagines you to be, or wants to re-create.

In order to love someone, you must know that person as fully as possible. Each must show that the other's well being is as important as one's own. Love is mutual. It requires picking up the slack without measuring. Love is a quality, not a quantity.

You must share a common value system while keeping an open mind to examine things from your mate's viewpoint

Occasionally, you must be willing to accommodate and grant concessions, providing it doesn't compromise your value system.

A good marriage also depends on an adequate frustration tolerance level. This means a tolerance of your partner's habits or behaviors—some of which may be more or less frustrating depending on your state of mind at that particular moment. For example, when things aren't going well at work or at home or you're feeling out of sorts, your frustration toler-

ance level can tumble. In other words, a relationship is like a piece of fabric: when one part unravels, it causes more unraveling.

Other qualities that help make for a successful union are detailed throughout this book and illustrated in examples. Identifying qualities within yourself and your prospective spouse will show whether you are emotionally ready for marriage—for a lifetime with that special person in whose company you feel most comfortable

Few couples admit that they would accept a devastating relationship, yet too many accept it as their plight, or their willingness to be martyrs. Based upon clinical observations, at least 15% who stay married would not rate their marriages as satisfactory. Still, many couples enjoy relationships that are a great source of fulfillment, emotional gratification, and comfort.

Grim statistics show that approximately one half of American marriages have ended in divorce. The statistic appears to be going down, perhaps as a result of premarital education. A research project cited in *Family Relationships* reviewed 23 studies on the effectiveness of premarital education and found that the average couple who participated in a premarital counseling or education program reports a significantly stronger marriage than other couples. This book can serve that purpose.

Many people are marrying for the second or third time, repeating their mistakes with other mates who on the surface may appear to be different from their former spouses, but may nevertheless present similar ways of interacting.