



## MARRIAGE CONFERENCE

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# Facilitator's Guide for Groups

Thanks for being willing to facilitate this conference. This is important work! Strengthening marriages doesn't just make people happier... it makes them and their families healthier and our churches and communities stronger. Did you know that happily married people live longer, have less illness, make more money and have more and better sex? And did you know that married couples produce children who do better in school, get in less trouble with the law, display less high-risk behaviour and are more likely to build lasting marriages?

In spite of these proven benefits and blessings, research suggests only 20% of couples ever do anything intentional to improve their marriage. So... you are doing something great and we thank you! Be sure to affirm the folks who have chosen to be part of this conference. They too are making a great, and all too uncommon, investment.

This guide contains our best suggestions to maximize the impact and benefits of *Together for Good*. We strongly recommend you employ all the suggestions, as they have been tested and have proven helpful, adapting as your unique setting may require, of course. Here are some simple steps in the areas of preparation, event execution and follow up.

# 1. Preparation

## TEAMWORK

Plan for enough volunteers to work with you so your guests are well served and you are not over-stretched and stressed! The exact number of folks needed will vary by the size of the event, but here are the tasks that need attention: greeting, registration, hosting/emceeing, tech support, beverages and snacks (if you choose to provide them).

## PROMOTION

The best workshop is of no value to those who do not come. Here are some key principles of effective promotion:

- **Start early.** Many people will need to work on scheduling the time for the conference.
- **Make the promotion attractive.** Think of how to make the announcements and advertising creative and fun. After hearing or reading your promotion, would you want to attend?
- **Use multiple channels** — print, posters, emails, social media, live announcements and of course — the most effective — personal invitation.
- **Repeat announcements.** The average church-goer attends one Sunday in three. If you promote three weeks in a row, the average person will only hear it once. Repeat social media and email invitations as well in order to make your invitation stick.

## LOGISTICS

- **Welcome and registration.** The event begins when the folks show up at your venue, not when the teaching begins. Think of what will make people feel that they were expected, they will be taken care of and something worth their time will happen (things like clear signage, easy check in, good looking material).
- Here are some specifics you and your team should think through:
  - Local health protocols need to be followed by all participants in every regard. Be prepared with sanitizer and masks. If couples are unable or unwilling to comply, please encourage them to stream the conference in the privacy of their own home.
  - Greeters
  - Name tags
  - Handouts printed and available, one per person (we have learned that if you do one copy per couple, it is like inviting one person to take the sessions off)
  - Music in the room. We recommend having music in the room before sessions, between sessions and after the final session. Music sets a tone and a silent room creates tension. We also recommend playing relationship music, the kind of music your couples may have dated to, music they may listen to together today. This is especially true if you are using the sessions as an outreach or for Christ followers to invite their non-Christian spouses. We love worship music... at a worship service.
  - Tables and chairs spaced to allow both social distancing and privacy for couples' conversations
  - Presentation technology tested and running smoothly (video projector, screens, microphones)
  - Break times scheduled — offer freshments if you can do so in a healthy way

## 2. Event Execution

This guide assumes you will be streaming *Together for Good* from Vimeo. We recommend that you hardwire your computer connection as opposed to trusting the wireless network. If you are concerned about inconsistent Internet streaming disrupting your conference, there is also a download option available for purchase on Vimeo.

The basic structure of the conference is that Sharol and Neil Josephson will do a segment of teaching on the video and then they will introduce the couple's projects (called "Your Turn"). Continue to let the video feed run as the project time and project music are pre-set and will end when it is time for the couples to wrap up their conversation. Each session concludes clearly and at that time the feed can be paused.

### HOST/EMCEE

It is important to have the right person playing the role of host/emcee. This person — or couple — will warm the room, call folks together at the beginning of each session and provide clear instructions at the end of each session (regarding breaks and schedule). A good host/emcee helps people relax knowing that someone has thought things through, someone is in charge and that they will create a safe, productive environment. This person can make people feel stressed and controlled, or make them feel safe and relaxed. The host/emcee needs to preview all the sessions so that they know what is coming at all times. A common temptation for hosts/emcees is to get up and rephrase the conference teaching or to add to it. This should be resisted. It adds unbudgeted time to the conference plus any evaluative or summary comments will reflect the host's personal filter and may actually take away from what the couple has taken to heart from the session.

### TECH PERSON(S)

When tech goes well, no one notices. When it doesn't, no one can concentrate on the teaching/learning. The tech tasks are to start and stop the music, start and stop the digital presentation and to control volume levels of the presentation, music and the mics. One experienced person can do this. But having two tech people means less stress and likely fewer mistakes. It may be obvious, but the tech equipment should be tried and tested... and then retested... prior to folks arriving so when they walk in the room the music is playing, the welcome screen is up and all is relaxed and professional.

### WORKBOOKS

Be sure to have the workbooks downloaded and printed at least one day ahead. Murphy's law of printing says that if you plan to print just before the event, the copier will jam or run out of ink/toner or who knows what. Reduce your stress. Do it at least a day ahead. Print several extra copies to allow for walk-ins, spilled coffee or whatever. If you would like to order professionally printed workbooks from FamilyLife Canada (\$15 + tax and shipping for 2 manuals. Quantity discounts also available) you can order them at [familylifecanada.com/tfg-workbook](https://familylifecanada.com/tfg-workbook). Remember, last minute shipping is the most expensive! We recommend placing your order at least two weeks before the event. One more note — it is a bit of a mystery why folks show up to a conference with nothing to write with... but they will, so be prepared. This is a nice time to place your organization's pen in their hands if you have something like that.

# 3. Follow Up

Planning the follow up to the conference should actually be part of the preparation, not an add-on later. As you plan, think of the couples who will come to this conference, all with some hopes, needs and expectations for their marriage. They will process the experience in different ways depending on where they are at when they come and how open they are to learn and change. Our experience has taught us that the folks at your event will fall roughly into a classic bell curve distribution:

- On the one end, some couples will be doing well and the conference will just give them confidence that they are on the right track plus some language and concepts to pass on to others. A next step for these folks might be some form of leadership. Perhaps they should be challenged and equipped to mentor a younger couple or perhaps to lead a couples small group or maybe join the marriage ministry leadership team. Think through the options you can offer ahead of time and present them sometime during the conference.
- On the other end are couples who are in real need of repair. Perhaps they will come to this event hoping for a breakthrough... a miracle even. Sometimes that happens but we also know that when couples are really in desperate condition, the conference can underscore for them that they are stuck and need help. It is important to offer these folks a place to turn. If your church offers couples' counseling, you can offer that. Perhaps providing a mentor couple is the right next step. For those in need of professional care, perhaps you can offer the names of a few local Christian counselors. The point here is to have these options prepared ahead of time and offered at some point in the conference.
- The majority of the couples who come to marriage events will be in the middle of the bell curve — doing ok in many respects but with some scratchy areas that they are aware of... and some they are unaware of. For these folks, the key things to offer are follow ups that encourage them to keep working on things and keep growing together... tools that help them stay together for good. Here are some good follow up ideas for this group:

**DATE NIGHT.** Organized by the church 4-6 weeks later. Have promotional materials for this event (perhaps just a business card with a "Save the Date") at the conference and maybe even sell tickets on the spot. Consider linking any teaching that night to the content from this conference in order to remind, reinforce and rekindle the weekend experience and commitments.

**LAUNCH A NEW SMALL GROUP FOR COUPLES.** Have the leaders pre-selected and the launch date set. Take sign-ups on the spot and in the following week. We recommend a 4-5 week study so folks aren't intimidated. If the couples love being together, they can always extend the commitment. If you ask for a 13-week commitment right off the start, many folks will balk.

**ENCOURAGE FOLKS TO CHECK OUT FAMILYLIFECANADA.COM FOR A WEALTH OF MARRIAGE AND PARENTING RESOURCES.** Folks can sign up there for our monthly newsletter containing encouraging articles for building into their marriage. Liking us on Facebook is also a good way to see more nuggets of marriage wisdom.

**MARRIAGE MENTORING.** This is our favourite way to follow up with people who want to keep growing in their marriage. If you are going to offer this at your event, we recommend that you already have mentors trained or, if you are going to solicit mentors and mentees at the conference, consider having a training date set and an application track for mentees available on site. You can learn more at [marriage mentoring initiative.com](http://marriage mentoring initiative.com).

Across this whole spectrum, there are often individuals who make significant spiritual commitments during the conference. Think through what your church offers to those who make a first time commitment to follow Jesus and be sure to inform the folks about that. Others will be making a decision to make Jesus Lord of their marriage and family instead of just a visitor in their home. What can your church offer to those who make this commitment? Before they leave the conference, be sure folks know what their options are for further growth and learning.

## 4. Our Partnership

We want you to have a significant marriage-building event. Please contact us if we can provide further assistance in any way... or if you just want to pray with us for your event. We are so grateful you are engaged in the cause of building marriages.

Please do let us know when you are holding your *Together for Good* event so we can pray for you and perhaps assist with planning and next steps. Help us keep improving what we offer by telling us how things went after the event and passing along any suggestions. We sincerely want your wisdom and insight and promise to consider all suggestions as we shape our future ministry efforts.

We encourage you to contact us at [events@familylifecanada.com](mailto:events@familylifecanada.com) if we can serve you and your church as you seek to bless the marriages and families of your community.

# 5. Session Overviews

## SESSION ONE Approximately 55 minutes

In this session, Sharol and Neil try to accomplish a few things:

- Establish a warm tone, one that says this will be safe, fun and worthwhile
- Establish the foundation for staying *Together for Good*
- Outline the two concepts woven through the following sessions: differences and drift
- Guide each couple to look just a bit at where they have come from (family background) and where they are going (future vision)

## SESSION TWO Approximately 60 minutes

Neil and Sharol begin going deeper on the dynamics of marriage, focusing in this session on Drift. Specifically, how to manage drift... because drift happens! The primary tool for dealing with drift is communication. Sharol and Neil lead couples to see their own communication styles more clearly and they reinforce best communication practices for each person to use.

## SESSION THREE Approximately 50 minutes

Neil and Sharol continue going deeper on the dynamics of marriage, focusing in this session on the differences that can help or hinder us staying *Together for Good*.

Differences lead to conflict, which is the focus of this session. Sharol and Neil lead the participants to discern what causes conflict in their relationship, what makes it flare out of control and how to deal with the ongoing impact of conflict.

## SESSION FOUR Approximately 50 minutes

The focus of this session is the sexual dimension of being *Together for Good*. Sharol and Neil guide the participants to understand the dynamics of their sexual relationship and provide a process for them to think helpfully about where they are at and where they might go.

There are no “Your Turn” projects in this session. There is a significant take home project at the end of this section of the manual that Sharol and Neil will introduce at the end of this session.

## SESSION FIVE Approximately 60 minutes

In this final session, Sharol and Neil begin by simply presenting Jesus’ invitation to follow him and make him the centre of our marriage and family. They explore spiritual differences in the second half and suggest ways couples can be *Together for Good* spiritually.