

News Release

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Vow to talk about money before the wedding

Before you walk down the aisle together, take time for an admittedly non-romantic discussion about finances.

As difficult as it may seem, discussing past money troubles, income disparities, and financial obligations before you tie the knot can help you avoid major marital conflicts in the future. Exploring each of your money styles and financial histories will help you create a money system that fits both of your needs.

The best way to find out where you each stand on important money matters is to put all your cards on the table in a discussion about the financial decisions you'll be making together. Talk about how you'll manage your income(s) and spending, along with important issues like saving, investing, insurance and planning for common goals. An honest discussion of these issues before the wedding will help build respect for each other's opinions later on.

One way to prepare for this discussion is to separately gather important documents and records that will help you answer basic financial questions about your assets, your current income, and your current and potential liabilities. Set aside time to have a frank conversation in which you will both share your money management style, previous financial problems, tax liabilities, financial commitments and retirement savings.

Here are some conversation starters:

- When you make a purchase do you start saving for it, research it, shop around for the best deal, or purchase it immediately?
- Do you track your finances on a regular basis so you know the details of your financial situation at all times, periodically, or not at all?
- If you received money unexpectedly would you invest it, save it, or spend it?
- Do you pay your bills as soon as they arrive, when they are due, or when you get around to it? Do you spend what's left after the bills are paid or save it?
- Do you pay your credit card balance in full each month, as much as you can, or the minimum amount needed to maintain the account?
- When it comes to managing money together would you rather pool your resources and divide the money management responsibilities, share responsibility for some expenses and maintain separate accounts, or keep all assets separated to the maximum extent possible?

To keep day-to-day issues in perspective, have regular money meetings. Review practices and resolve problems before they become overwhelming.

In Wisconsin, assets acquired during marriage are considered community property. The 1986 Wisconsin Marital Property Law states that all earned income, property and family purpose debt acquired during marriage could be recognized as belonging to both spouses. Individual property is provided for in the marital property law. Property owned before the marriage, or property, gifts or inheritances received after the marriage can be excluded from this law if you keep good records like bank statements, canceled checks, title transfer and proofs of purchases. You may want to consider a marital property agreement, which can legally determine which properties will be kept individual and which will be marital.

To learn more about the implications of the Wisconsin Marital Property Law, see the UW-Extension publication "Look Before You Leap" (#B2707) at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>; click on Home and Family, then Financial/Consumer publications.

Money is an issue for nearly every couple. Taking time before the wedding to have an honest discussion of money matters is the best starting point to keep finances from becoming a point of conflict in your marriage.

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