

EDUCATION FOR MARRIAGE A "MUST" FOR STABILITY

by Louise Chase
Women's Medical News
Service

Toronto (WMNS)—When young couples start having babies soon after marriage and before they've been able to establish stable relationships with each other, they are heading for marital shipwreck. This is what Prof. Ethel Nash, president of the American Association of Marriage Counselors told Women's Medical News Service at a recent meeting here.

Not only is the marriage endangered, says the professor, who teaches at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, N.C., but an atmosphere is created in the home in which

the children feel neither wanted nor understood.

What are the possible consequences for these children when they grow to adulthood? Professor Nash believes that "there is a very real danger that such unhappy family situations tend to perpetuate themselves. People whose own childhood and family relationships have been unsound," she says, "tend to find marital partners with similar unfortunate backgrounds. Having no pattern of happy marriages to follow, being full of unresolved conflicts that originated in the childhood, such couples are often quite unable to build stable marriages. The result: another generation of unhappy marriages, unwanted children."

Can this cycle be broken? It can be, says Mrs. Nash, but only if we face up to the reasons behind the breakup of one in two teenage marriages within five years of the wedding date, and usually after the birth of one or more children.

Reasons for Teen Divorce

One reason is faulty or inadequate education on human sexuality, conception control and family living. The marriage counselor points out that young people generally go from nursery school through college

without being taught about the human reproductive system, sex drives, and differences between male and female sexuality.

Young people are surrounded by sexually stimulating ads, stories, movies and TV shows, Mrs. Nash notes. They observe values which seem to place a higher worth on a sexually attractive model or movie star than on any other person. "Is it any wonder," the marriage counselor asks, "that young people have faulty notions about what sex is, how and when it can be best expressed, how it can be guided and controlled to achieve maximum happiness?"

Similarly, few young people have anything like an adequate knowledge of conception control. With 45 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men marrying for the first time under 20 years of age, Mrs. Nash says, this information must be made available to young people before they wander haphazardly into parenthood and begin the cycle of broken marriages. (She notes that one sixth of all marriages, and one half to one third of all teenage marriages, take place with the girl pregnant at the marriage ceremony.)

"A partnership must be established between home, school, church, the medical profession and other appropriate community resources for honest, informed education in these areas," Mrs. Nash maintains.

Youth Pushed into Marriage

Another reason for disastrous marriages, according to Mrs. Nash, is that parents often push their children into early marriages. This is despite the almost universal recognition that the teen years are full of stress, that young people are trying to find out who and what they are, and are trying to reconcile new and unfamiliar physical and emotional drives. They are searching, in short, for themselves, Mrs. Nash says. Before they have found themselves, however, they are urged by parents or by other social pressures to find a mate, marry and settle down.

How can such marriages succeed? says Mrs. Nash. In most instances the teenagers have not yet resolved all the conflicts raging inside themselves; they have not evolved sound values or

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