



iQuestions Faculty, Michael and Amy Smalley

Question:

We're engaged, but aren't getting married for a year. We want to move in together but our family is discouraging us from doing so. Is it wrong to live together before we get married?

Answer:

MICHAEL: We totally get where you're coming from, you're in love and you are thinking, "We're going to get married anyway, so why don't we just move in with each other?"

AMY: "We could save a couple of bucks."

MICHAEL: That would probably have been *your* reason, Amy. But I would have thought, "This is a great trial run for marriage. So then we will know if we are *really* meant to be together."

But the research actually paints a totally different picture. Cohabitation couples are not as successful. They have a much higher divorce rate than couples who just did the regular dating thing and got married.

AMY: Women who cohabit have an 80% higher divorce rate than those who don't.

Another bad statistic for women: women who cohabit also are more likely to be abused. For cohabitating couples, that can be very much a part of their relationship. That's not a great set-up for a marriage.

And I think the other thing is that couples think, "Oh, this is a trial run"—but it's not.



Because of the intensity and the commitment level that marriage brings... you have spent money on the wedding, you may have gotten married in the church, so you might even feel a moral obligation—that raises the intensity of the emotions that you feel in a marriage.

You can't replicate those emotions when you're just dating. So, the problem that many cohabitating couples experience is that it was easy, it was fun, and then they get married and everything changes. That is one of the big reasons why there is a high divorce rate among couples who cohabit before marriage.

So the reality, Amy, is that if you truly love each other, the last thing you want to do is cohabit, because that almost virtually ensures your demise.

AMY: I also want to bring up the difference of what cohabitation means to men and women. There is a difference there. To women, a lot of times they see this as, "This is a part of our journey towards marriage."

MICHAEL: Kind of a next step.

AMY: Where men a lot of times think, "Oh, let's see if we are ready for that 'next step.'" Do you see that there is a slight difference there?

MICHAEL: Are you suggesting that men are not as committed as women are?

AMY: Yeah, basically.

MICHAEL: And it's true.

AMY: It is. And I think it is so hard.



For Michael and me, had we not had that committed relationship, you know our first year of marriage was very tumultuous. We were fighting all the time.

MICHAEL: Well, if you had just listened to me more, it wouldn't have been so bad.

AMY: That's right.

But until we really learned how to communicate, that is what really turned our marriage around. The commitment is really what stabilized our relationship. I thought, "There is not going to be an easy out. I am in this for the long haul, and I want to make this work" and, in a cohabitation relationship, you really do have one foot in, and one foot out.

Your family almost keeps their love at bay, because they don't really know, "Is this going to be a lifetime commitment? Should I really call this person son or daughter? Because it may not work out."

So there's another part of that aspect of your family and the relationships that that dynamic plays into your decision to cohabit as well.