

How the same-sex marriage debate is threatening to change the meaning of marriage in more ways than one

An extract from Norman Wells' report at this year's Family Education Trust conference in central London.

It has been striking over recent months to see so many politicians, commentators and campaigners who have not had a good word to say for marriage in the past, falling over themselves to register their support for same-sex marriage.

I am not suggesting for one moment that everyone who is backing same-sex marriage wants to destroy marriage. That's not the case at all. But there are many in the vanguard of the same-sex marriage campaign who are consciously seeking to so broaden the definition of marriage that it loses its meaning and ceases to exist as an institution. Once a word can mean anything, it starts to mean nothing.

We have been making the point over and over again that there are four key elements in the legal definition of marriage: it is *voluntary*, it is *monogamous*, it is *lifelong*, and it is *heterosexual*. All four are fundamental to the character of marriage. While there is no threat to the voluntary nature of marriage, each of the other three elements is at risk.

We know from the experience of other countries that once you allow two men or two women to marry, there is pressure to legislate for threesomes, foursomes, or moresomes. And why not? If we've already decided that marriage no longer has any fixed meaning and we don't have to be

bound by what it has meant in the past, why can't we treat it as a nose of wax and mould it this way and that? And after all, isn't it discriminatory against people with a bisexual orientation to deny them a marriage partner of each sex?

Long-term or lifelong?

So if the heterosexual character of marriage is discarded, the monogamous character of marriage immediately comes under threat, and so, too, does the lifelong character of marriage. Stonewall have got plenty to say about 'long-term relationships', but you won't find them saying very much about *lifelong* relationships.

The Shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, has also adopted the language of marriage as a 'long-term relationship' rather than a lifelong union.

In a public statement issued on 12 June, she expressed the view that:

'Two people who love each other and want to make a *long-term* commitment to each other should be able to get married whatever their gender or sexuality...

'Parliament has legislated on civil marriage for 400 years. It should update it again now, as it has many times before, to make sure that the way the state recognises *long-term* loving relationships remains relevant and reflects our sense of justice and equality in a modern society.'

We all recognise that not all marriages last for life. The majority do, but not all. Nevertheless, when a man and a woman marry they commit themselves to each other with the intention of staying together for life. Marriage is not a *long-term* commitment, but a *lifelong* commitment.

But in the context of the same-sex marriage debate, we are already seeing that emphasis on the lifelong character of marriage being eroded.



Norman Wells (second from right) with other directors of the Coalition for Marriage delivering over 500,000 signed petitions to the Home Office in June.

The petition remains open and is continuing to grow. Please help us to reach a million signatures by encouraging your friends to sign at www.c4m.org.uk or on printed petition forms available from the Family Education Trust office.

Positives and negatives in the ongoing sex education debate

Government ministers have signalled that schools must be more sensitive and responsive to the concerns of parents over inappropriate sex education materials.

At the beginning of the year, the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, stressed that parents must be in the driving seat when it comes to determining what sex education resources are used in schools. In response to a parliamentary colleague who had raised with him the concerns of one of her constituents, Mr Gibb wrote:

*'It is important that parents have the right to decide on what is appropriate for their children in these sensitive matters.'*¹



Nick Gibb

More recently, Mr Gibb has strongly criticised some parts of the BBC's sex education programme and Channel 4's *Living and Growing* series, which are both very popular in primary schools. Commenting on the Channel 4 series, Nick Gibb said: *'Parents will be shocked that this type of material is present in primary schools and even more surprised that councils are recommending it.'*² According to press reports, the Minister had a 'robust discussion' with Channel 4 executives in April.

erial fiat'. However, the Minister would not be drawn, choosing to respond with the non-committal statement, 'I am not going to pre-empt what the consultation will come up with.'⁴

Grassroots

Meanwhile, at grassroots level, Family Education Trust is coming across more and more examples of local authorities putting pressure on primary schools to teach sex education and to use inappropriate materials like the Channel 4 *Living and Growing* series. Some schools are becoming very defensive when challenged about the materials being used and are refusing to engage with parents regarding

their concerns. In some cases, schools are refusing to let parents see the school's sex education policy – even though the law explicitly states that schools must 'make copies of the statement available for inspection (at all reasonable times)...and provide a copy of the statement free of charge' upon request.

Some schools are also making it difficult for parents to exercise their legal right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons and placing obstacles in their way.

Although the government had initially intended to announce proposals for further public consultation in the summer term, the Schools Minister Nick Gibb has more recently stated that the outcome of the review of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education will now be published later in the year.⁵

Notes

1. Nick Gibb MP, letter to a parliamentary colleague, 31 January 2012.
2. Jonathan Petre, 'Minister attacks Channel 4's "shocking" sex education film aimed at five-year-olds', *Mail on Sunday*, 3 June 2012.
3. HC Hansard, 14 June 2012, cols 457-458.
4. HC Hansard, 27 February 2012, col 14.
5. HC Hansard, 25 June 2012, col 128W.



Ed Vaizey

In a recent Parliamentary exchange, Andrea Leadsom, the Conservative MP for South Northamptonshire told the Media Minister, Ed Vaizey that many parents were concerned that sex education videos used in schools had no external rating at all and were being sold for profit by commercial organisations. She asked the Minister to consider requiring the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) to rate such videos. In reply, Mr Vaizey said he would arrange to meet the BBFC to discuss the issue and invited Mrs Leadsom to accompany him.³

Less forthright

Notwithstanding these positive developments, Ministers have been less forthright in reaffirming their earlier commitment not to make sex education part of the National Curriculum. In a parliamentary exchange in February, Stewart Jackson MP asked the Education Minister, Tim Loughton to 'confirm that the responsibility for SRE [sex and relationships education] in the curriculum will remain with individual school governing bodies and parents and not be subject to minist-

Lifelong marriage: more important than money, career or fame, say young and old alike

A marriage that lasts for life is the top aspiration of 18-24 year-olds, according to a survey conducted by the charity Friends of the Elderly.

The survey presented 2,000 young people with a list of over 50 life aims and asked them which one of them they considered the greatest achievement in life. Significantly, a lifelong marriage was viewed as the thing most worth aspiring to by 26 per cent of young people – a far higher proportion than selected any other option.

Having a successful career, travelling the world, retiring on a healthy pension, gaining wealth and fame, or owning a prestigious car or second home paled into insignificance compared with having a stable marriage and family life.

An identical question and list of options was also presented to 2,000 people over the age of 55. As they looked back on their lives so far, they too prized a lifelong marriage and becoming a parent more highly than anything else.

Ranking	Age	18-24	Over-55s
1		A marriage that lasts for life (26%)	A marriage that lasts for life (25%)
2		Being happy (14%)	Becoming a parent (19%)
3		Becoming a parent (10%)	Being happy (8%)
4		Seeing your child get married (8%)	Staying healthy (7%)
5		Putting children through university (4%)	To have no regrets (6%)
6		Being mortgage free (3%)	Being mortgage free (3.25%)
7		Being able to share knowledge (2.2%)	Becoming a grandparent and to be instrumental in their lives (3.2%)
8		Owning a good quality watch (2.1%)	Putting children through university (2.75%)
9		Retiring on a healthy pension (1.94%)	Learning to accept yourself (2.7%)
10		Staying healthy (1.9%)	Seeing your child get married (2.6%)

Friends of the Elderly: The top ten life achievements

Should chemists give the pill to under-16s?

In the following article, first published in the Times, Norman Wells presents the case against the supply of the pill to underage girls without consultation with a doctor, without a prescription and without parental involvement.

Over recent years we have witnessed the systematic removal of every restraint that, in previous generations, served as a disincentive to underage sexual activity. Explicit sex education in schools has served to break down the natural sexual caution of ever-younger children and, since the age of consent is rarely enforced, young people no longer fear legal proceedings.

In addition, the ready availability of contraception means that a girl's fear of pregnancy is no longer considered a good enough reason for rejecting the advances of her boyfriend - or any other male - and confidentiality policies mean that a girl need not worry about what her parents would think about her being sexually active, obtaining contraception, being treated for a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or even having an abortion.

Making the contraceptive pill available to girls under 16 at pharmacies and saving them the embarrassment of making an appointment to see a doctor will further promote underage sexual experimentation.

As many doctors have noted, the lack of a thorough medical consultation presents potentially serious health risks, especially in girls who smoke. Pharmacy supply to underage girls also raises significant child protection issues. The easier it becomes for young teenage girls to obtain the pill, the more scope there is for abuse.

“The last thing [health authorities] should be doing is fuelling the flames of a sexual health crisis with schemes that treat parents, the law and basic moral principles with contempt.”

There is no evidence that confidential contraceptive schemes succeed in reducing teenage conception rates. Research published in the *Journal of Health Economics* last year concluded that schemes to provide emergency birth control to under-16s at pharmacies did not cut teenage pregnancy rates but led to increases in diagnoses of STIs. Growing numbers of teenagers are left carrying emotional baggage into adult-

hood that will make it more difficult for them to build an intimate, trusting and stable marriage later on.

Regret

Many girls later regret their early sexual experiences and some say they would never have embarked on an illegal sexual relationship under the age of 16, had it not been for the confidential provision of contraception.

Advocates of its provision to underage girls are swift to cite the Fraser guidelines, which permit legal supply subject to certain criteria. However, Lord Fraser emphasised that ‘any important medical treatment of a child under 16 would normally only be carried out with the parents’ approval’ and that it should be ‘most unusual for a doctor to advise a child without the knowledge and consent of parents on contraceptive matters’.

If health authorities are interested in reducing underage teenage conception, abortion and STI rates, they should look for ways to discourage young people from engaging in sexual activity. The last thing they should be doing is fuelling the flames of a sexual health crisis with schemes that treat parents, the law and basic moral principles with contempt.

• **This article was published in the Times on Friday 4 May 2012 as part of a debate feature with Simon Blake, chief executive of Brook.**

Pharmacy supply of the contraceptive pill: the background

Even though the pilot initiative to provide the oral contraceptive pill over the counter in local pharmacies in Southwark and Lambeth was limited to women over the age of 16, the evaluation report recommended that the scheme should be extended to girls as young as 13 in an attempt to reduce teenage pregnancies.¹

Already NHS Manchester and NHS Isle of Wight are operating pilot schemes providing the pill to girls under 16 and the Department of Health has given its blessing to the initiatives.²

Notes

1. NHS South-East London, *Evaluation of Oral Contraception in Community Pharmacy Pilot in Southwark and Lambeth: Final Evaluation Report*, January 2012.
2. Pulse press release, ‘Girls aged 13-16 should get pharmacy access to Pill, evaluation recommends’, 25 April 2012.

The FPA and the age of consent

When the story broke about the pharmacy provision of the contraceptive pill to under-16s, Family Education Trust was in demand from all sections of the press and media. Our trustee, Dr Trevor Stammers took the lion's share of media calls and gave numerous radio and television interviews, but a comment made by Rebecca Findlay, the *fpa* press and campaigns manager particularly caught our attention.

In the course of a radio debate with the Trust's chairman, Arthur Cornell, Ms Findlay stated:

*‘[W]e don't make any judgment about when young people should have sex. Fifteen might be the right age for a young person. We don't know, but each young person should be given the information and education so that they don't feel coerced, so that they wait until they are ready.’**

According to the *fpa*, the law notwithstanding, 15 might be the ‘right age’ for young people to be sexually active. In fact, since the *fpa* doesn't make any judgment about when young people become sexually active at all, the ‘right age’ might be even lower still.

* *The Peter Levy Show, BBC Radio Humberside, 26 April 2012.*

Conference report

This year's AGM and conference was once again an encouraging and inspiring occasion, as supporters and friends of Family Education Trust from the length and breadth of the United Kingdom gathered at the RAF Club in London's Piccadilly on Saturday 23 June.

The Trust's chairman, **Arthur Cornell** reflected on several recent studies highlighting the damaging consequences of family fragmentation and the breakdown of parental authority and commented that it had never been more important to make the case for the vital role of the family in producing rounded individuals able to contribute to a stable society. In his director's report, **Norman Wells** gave an overview of some of the Trust's activities over the previous year and made some observations on the current moves to redefine marriage. Extracts from his report are featured elsewhere in this bulletin.

The brief reports from Family Education Trust supporters who have engaged in campaigns and other activities in support of the family are always eagerly anticipated and this year's contributors lived up to expectations.



Julie Maxwell

Dr Maxwell had continued to raise her concerns about the sex education provision at her local primary school, but had faced considerable resistance. She had, on

one occasion, been rebuked by the chair of governors for raising the subject at a school governors' meeting. However, she remained committed to raising awareness of the issue among parents and to impress upon them the need to make their voices heard.

Dr Maxwell reported that four children out of 50 in her daughter's year had been withdrawn from sex education lessons at the school, and she had used Lovewise materials with small groups of children outside the school setting. One girl who attended a Lovewise session commented that marriage had not been mentioned in the lessons given at school.

Dr Maxwell had met with her MP and received a positive response, and was also in touch with a sympathetic councillor. She had also held two meetings with senior figures on her county council.



Yusuf Patel

Mr Patel reported on a campaign he had been involved with in Tower Hamlets, where it had become evident that there was an unhealthy relationship between

the local authority and primary schools. Local authority advice on sex education was routinely being given priority over parental concerns. Many teachers and governing bodies had strong reservations

about the materials being used, yet were defending their use simply because they were recommended by the local authority. Some schools were giving parents only a few days' notice before teaching sex education, thus allowing them no opportunity to enquire about the curriculum and raise their concerns. In some instances, schools had renamed the subject Health and Relationships Education to conceal the true nature of the curriculum and there had been cases of schools using sex education materials in science lessons and then telling parents they had no right to withdraw their children because science was part of the national curriculum.

Mr Patel and his colleagues had been anxious to make parents aware of the fact that government guidance states that schools must consult parents about their policy on sex education and that teaching on sexual matters did not form part of national curriculum science in key stages 1 and 2. As a result of his campaign, some schools in Tower Hamlets had changed their approach and the local authority had written to schools advising them that they cannot deprive parents of the right to withdraw their children from sex education by including it in science lessons.

Mr Patel was now encouraging parents to put pressure on schools to take parental concerns into account. Local councillors were aware of the campaign and were conscious that how they resp-

onded to parents could have an impact on votes at the next council elections. Mr Patel stressed that when parents work together they have more impact than when working in isolation.



Mary Russell

In the wake of news reports of MP David Lammy's concerns that parents are fearful of smacking their children because of the threat of legal action, Mrs

Russell had been invited to give several radio interviews. She had argued that children's rights activists hold a very twisted view of family life and show no shame about claiming to have the child's best interest at heart while being prepared to drag families through the courts and cause considerable distress in order to impose their particular blueprint on child rearing.

Mrs Russell had subsequently debated sex education with a representative of Brook following publicity surrounding a mother who allowed her teenage daughter to invite boys to stay in her room and provided a double bed for them. The Brook spokesman had asserted that sex education should be early and explicit, that teenagers should be aware they are able to access contraceptive services and that parents had nothing to be afraid of. Mrs Russell, however, pointed out that she had seen sex education programmes that would make a sailor blush and argued that age-related non-negotiables,

New trustees



Four new trustees were elected at the Annual General Meeting. From left to right: Julie Maxwell, Anna Lines, Fiona Wyatt and Sarah Carter.

like driving, taking out a loan, drinking and selling cigarettes, were intended to protect young people.

Abortion remained largely illegal in Northern Ireland and contraceptive services aimed at teenagers were less prevalent than in other parts of the UK. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were also lower rates of teenage conceptions, abortions and sexually transmitted infections. Mrs Russell quoted from a presentation given by Professor David Paton of Nottingham University Business School at a conference held in Northern Ireland during March:

'It is currently legal in Northern Ireland to provide birth control, including emergency birth control, to minors without parental knowledge or consent, albeit subject to certain conditions and guidelines. The evidence to date suggests that such a policy has little or no effect on rates of teenage pregnancy but may lead to an increase in risky sexual activity among minors.'

'Given that government departments are committed to trying to reduce rates of underage sexual activity, introducing mandatory parental consent before birth control is provided to minors would seem to be an obvious and sensible policy option.'

Mrs Russell had no doubt that this reasonable requirement would meet with the approval of all parents who care for their children in a way that no government department can.



Anna Tomalin

Mrs Tomalin reported on her involvement with sex education policy in both primary and secondary schools, as a parent and a parent governor.

Through her role as a primary school governor, Mrs Tomalin had familiarised herself with the schemes of work and resources recommended by the county council and gained a good understanding of the legal position. Based on this knowledge she had hoped to raise awareness of the role of governors and parents in determining how sex education was taught. However, she had reached the conclusion that in this particular school, consultation with parents on this subject was largely a box-ticking exercise and that the opinion of teachers and the opinion, or perceived opinion, of the local authority, counted for more than that of parents.

It became apparent that the school was unwilling to respond to parental concerns over the explicit nature of some parts of the Channel 4 *Living and Growing* series and that the school was commi-

tted to continue using it for as long as it remained on the county council list of recommended resources. Feeling she had ruffled too many feathers, Mrs Tomalin had reluctantly resigned from the governing body, though she hoped that other governors might continue to question the resources used and realise that she had not been fighting a single-handed campaign.

Shortly after her resignation, several parents of children from local primary schools raised their concerns about *Living and Growing* with Mrs Tomalin. A small group of parents subsequently met together and 18 parents signed a joint letter to the local MP. Two of the parents visited the MP in his surgery and alerted him to a situation that he had previously been unaware of.

Mrs Tomalin had also been involved in a meeting organised by Sue Relf for parents in East Sussex who were concerned about sex education. Family Education Trust resources had been made available to the parents and Antonia Tully from the Safe at School campaign had addressed a meeting of the group. A Facebook group had been formed which now had over 100 members and a further meeting was planned in July to discuss strategy and action.

Mrs Tomalin reported that her local secondary school was currently reviewing its sex and relationship education provision and she had engaged in several constructive and fruitful discussions with senior staff, including the headteacher. She encouraged parents to speak up. Where schools were receptive to parental concerns, parents could take the opportunity to make their views known boldly and wisely. If, however, a school refused to listen, Mrs Tomalin suggested that parents could work together with others in their area who shared their concerns and raise the issue with their local councillors, MP and Minister for Schools.

Elizabeth Jones

Dr Jones reported that Lovewise had recently produced a new Powerpoint presentation on *Sex and Emotional Health* for school years 10-13 (ages 15-18) based on the conviction that the emotional health of young people is possible. The presentation stressed that strong emotional desires can lead to poor choices with damaging consequences. A DVD for secondary schools was being prepared and would hopefully be available in the autumn term. Dr Jones hoped



Ann Whitaker



Ann Whitaker, photographed with the flower card which was presented to her to mark her 90th birthday on 12 May.

Miss Whitaker reported that Cornwall's Community Standards Association had distributed copies of *Unhealthy Confusion* and had produced a summary for circulation to MPs and county councillors. The association had also given away copies of the Family Education Trust leaflets *What is Love?* and *Sex Education in Primary Schools: Dispelling the myths.*

Miss Whitaker referred to several campaigns that she had been involved with, including campaigns against a sex shop in Truro and a lapdancing club in Newquay. She had also supported the attempt of Nadine Dorries MP to ensure that women had an opportunity to receive independent counselling before opting for an abortion. In addition, her group had participated in the consultation on same-sex marriage and had used the Family Education Trust briefing materials to encourage others to respond.

Miss Whitaker welcomed the formation of the Marriage Foundation and the growing publicity about the secrecy of the family courts, most notably through Christopher Booker's columns in the *Sunday Telegraph*.

that the DVD format might be more popular in schools, since it did not require teachers to align themselves with the message. A new member of staff would be promoting Lovewise resources from later in the year.

Lovewise continued to network with Family Education Trust and the Challenge Team UK, and with other members of the Relationships and Sex Education Council. The work had been the subject

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Conference report

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of a favourable report in the *Times Educational Supplement* in May under the title, 'Rise of the puritan classes'. The article was, however, accompanied by a negative editorial.

Dr Jones reported that schools that had been visited by Lovewise had received freedom of information requests and this was having an inhibiting effect on schools.



Sue Relf

Mrs Relf reported that during the current academic year, the Challenge Team had visited 56 schools and two youth groups. Since 2004, 59 trained presenters had given the presentation to 108,000 young people.

Feedback remained extremely positive. Mrs Relf referred to the Challenge Team's own survey of over 1,000 pupils, which showed that only two per cent had already decided to save sex for marriage, but after seeing the presentation over 40 per cent say that it will make a difference to the choices they make in the future, and 80 per cent say they think that all schools should see a Challenge Team presentation.

From September, the Challenge Team planned to continue partnering with existing companies or groups to take the presentation to schools in their areas, as well as recruiting its own team with a more limited schedule and time frame.

Ann Allen

In a written report, Family Education Trust executive committee member, Ann Allen, mentioned her involvement in the Scotland for Marriage campaign which was actively opposing moves to change the definition of marriage in Scotland. She had spoken at the launch outside the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh on 20 December 2011 and had taken numerous opportunities in the media to present the case for maintaining traditional marriage.

Despite having her bill for Legalising Assisted Suicide roundly defeated in 2011, Margo Macdonald, MSP was intending to raise the issue again and pursue it with vigour in the Scottish Parliament. However, another MSP was bringing forward a Bill to outlaw paying for sex, to build on the current legislation which outlaws kerb crawling.

The Scottish Children's Commissioner, Tam Baillie, had argued that schools should allow boys to wear skirts. Although such comments make good media fodder, Mrs Allen stated that Scottish schools were far too concerned with real issues to be side-tracked by such nonsense. There was, however, to be a consultation on children's rights and services, leading to subsequent legislative changes. Given the commissioner's record to date, this was a process that would need to be carefully monitored.

With the vote on Scottish independence looming, Mrs Allen noted that the Scottish Government would not want to alienate large sectors of voting population on sensitive issues. This therefore provided an opportunity to exert an influence for good in the area of family policy.

Rules Rites and Rituals: The building of great families and schools

Tony Sewell

Tony Sewell began by observing that while boys from a Caribbean background and white boys from deprived backgrounds were not achieving educationally, children from Chinese backgrounds were getting good exam results. In fact, he noted that girls from a Chinese background in receipt of free school meals were doing better in school than Chinese girls from more prosperous homes. He therefore rejected the common assumption that differences in educational achievement can be accounted for by poverty.

Instead, he suggested that there were several factors in what he termed a 'context of chaos' that provided a more satisfactory explanation for differences in educational outcomes:

- A fragile home life
- Excessive peer group pressure
- Few boundaries (or too many)
- Fatherless homes
- A lack of nurture and discipline
- Low aspirations
- Low social capital

He rejected the notion that poor educational outcomes of black Caribbean boys were due to teacher racism, the lack of black history or the absence of positive role models. He considered all these as poor excuses.

Dr Sewell explained that, by means of giving black boys from deprived backgrounds an identity and sense of belonging, his Generating Genius programme has achieved a large measure of success. Of the first 40 boys to take part in the programme, 38 are now studying sciences at Russell Group universities.

In Tony Sewell's view, education is about talent development. Its success requires building in children a respect for adults and encouraging politeness. He lamented the fact that education has become so child-centred in many schools that children are telling adults what to do. In state schools, teachers are being advised to keep their focus on pleasing children and encouraged to limit class teaching to only 10 per cent of the lesson. It is believed that children should be active for the remainder of the time. By way of contrast, in prep schools, the teacher is respected as the fount of knowledge and children are expected to listen and learn.

Rituals, rites and routine

Since education is about progressive learning steps, or rituals, Dr Sewell reasoned that schools should be 'highly ritualistic'. School assemblies and mealtimes were viewed as key rituals, and developing good handwriting was 'a disciplined ritualised activity'. Rituals that take place in the family need to be reinforced in the school.

Children need rites, as opposed to 'rights'. Dr Sewell noted that gangs provide rites of passage and argued that if parents and schools do not provide them, children will find them elsewhere. He rejected the 'all must have prizes' philosophy practised by many schools. Adults should not be frightened of children and feel that they have to reward them when they have not made an effort or achieved anything.

Primary schools should not be in the entertainment industry. Children should be expected to keep the rules and told that they must wait before they can have the privileges of the adult world.

• *Tony Sewell is founder and director of Generating Genius. Copies of his book, **Generating Genius: Black boys in search of love, ritual and schooling are available from Family Education Trust at £15.00 incl p&p (rrp £18.99).***





The Marriage Foundation

Harry Benson

Harry Benson began his address by relating how his involvement in the arena of marriage research and education arose out of difficulties in his own marriage.

As a stockbroker working in the Far East and a partner in a small firm, and married with two children, everything seemed to be going well on the outside, but he was brought up short one day by his wife who confronted him with the reality that things were not well in their marriage on the inside.

This confrontation led to a reappraisal of Mr Benson's priorities with the result that his attitude towards his wife changed and he started to put her first rather than himself. Following a marriage course they attended together in Taiwan, their marriage became unrecognisably better.

After this experience, Mr Benson mused that there must be thousands of 'Harrys and Kates' and, following his return to the UK, he established the Bristol Community Family Trust and started running marriage preparation courses and courses for newly-weds. More recently he has started a 'Let's Stick Together' course for new parents in postnatal clinics and children's centres, which is currently reaching one in four new mothers in the Bristol area.

Harry Benson presented two striking statistics to the meeting:

1. Almost half of all new babies in the UK will not grow up with both of their parents

Since children do not do as well with one parent as with two overall and since fewer resources are available to care for a child when only one parent is involved, it makes sense for parents to make every effort to stay together. Raising children is not an easy task under any circumstances, but it is a lot less difficult for a couple than for one parent alone.

2. The 2001 census showed that 97 per cent of intact couples with children aged 16 were married. Only 3 per cent were not married

It is overwhelmingly the case that the people who stay together are married. Many political figures and sections of the media imagine that it is just as possible to have a stable relationship without being married, but in reality it is relatively rare.

Commitment theory

Commitment theory was presented as a helpful way of understanding what makes relationships work. When two individuals are attracted to each other and get together, they form a new identity as a couple ('You' and 'Me' become 'Us'). When dedication, commitment and a willingness to sacrifice are present in the relationship, they become 'a couple with a future'. The presence of dedication is the secret of a successful marriage.

When a couple marry, they move from being 'a couple with a future but we don't know how long it's going to last' to 'a couple with a permanent future together'. Marriage serves as a constraint upon a man and a woman because other family members and friends now view them as a couple and that makes it harder for either of them to leave.

When dedication is strong, constraints feel positive, but when dedication is absent, constraints can feel like a trap. This accounts for lower levels of stability in cohabiting relationships, where a couple may have drifted into living together without making a deliberate and lifelong commitment to each other.

Mr Benson cited research showing that, during the first five years of marriage, wives who have cohabited prior to engagement have the same level of commitment as those who did not cohabit before getting engaged. However, among men who have cohabited before engagement there is a much lower level of commitment than among those who did not cohabit.¹

Marriage: the ultimate decision

A study of 1,200 young unmarried couples had shown that cohabitation and even having a baby together did not make it any more or less likely that an unmarried couple would stay together. What did make a difference, however, was buying a home together, having a pet together, or taking out a joint club membership or mobile phone contract.² While it is relatively easy for a couple to slide into living together and having a baby, these other actions involved making a definite decision that presupposes that the individuals concerned see themselves as 'a couple with a future'.

Marriage is unique in that it involves the ultimate decision to be a couple with a permanent future. It demands a deliberate act and removes all ambiguity.

Four rules for children

Harry Benson concluded with four rules he has given his children:

1. No boyfriends/girlfriends before the age of 18

It is almost inevitable that such relationships will not last, leading to emotional trauma and disaster. Such a rule takes

away sexual pressures from children who may lack the maturity to handle them.

2. They must be marriageable

Don't contemplate forming an exclusive romantic relationship with someone unless you can see yourself marrying them. Focus on their character, not their appearance and image. If at any point it becomes apparent that he or she is not marriageable, do not continue with the relationship.

3. Choose a decider, not a slider

Look for someone who can make a decision and stick to it, not a drifter. Since a man's commitment is based on decision-making, it is important that he should be the decision-maker.

4. Don't move in with them

Don't add a constraint to the relationship that will make it difficult to get out of it when things go wrong. 'Girls, say no to moving in until he says yes to your future.' Mr Benson suggested that adherence to these four principles could halve family breakdown overnight.

Notes

1. Stanley S, Rhoades G, Markman H, (2006). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499 – 509; Rhoades G, Stanley S, Markman H. (2006). Pre-engagement cohabitation and gender asymmetry in marital commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 553-560.

2. Rhoades G, Stanley S, Markman H, (2010), Should I stay or should I go? Predicting dating relationship stability from four aspects of commitment, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(5), 543-550.

● Harry Benson is communications director of the newly-formed Marriage Foundation. Copies of his book, *Let's Stick Together: The relationship book for new parents*, are available from Family Education Trust at £6.50 (incl p&p).

Parental Internet Controls

The Department for Education has launched a public consultation with a view to keeping children safe when using the internet.

In addition to highlighting the risk that children might be exposed to online pornography, the consultation paper also refers to the danger of children accessing websites promoting suicide, anorexia, self-harm and violence, or that they might be the targets of online sexual grooming or bullying. The document states:

'No technical solution, on its own, can be 100 per cent effective in blocking age-inappropriate web content or behavioural issues, but it is right to look at the role technical solutions can play as part of a package which also includes education, awareness raising, and, if necessary, regulatory measures.'

The government is particularly seeking the views of parents on how internet service providers (ISPs) can help them keep their children safe online. One of the options under consideration is to require ISPs to provide broadband connections into homes with filters in place to block access to pornography as a default setting. Adults who wanted to have these filters removed would then have to advise their ISP that they wished to 'opt in' to these sites.

• Department for Education consultation on Parental Internet Controls.

Closing date for responses: 6 September 2012.

Consultation responses can be completed online at:
www.education.gov.uk/consultations

or emailed to:

ParentalInternetControls.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you!

We are very grateful to all our supporters who responded to our recent annual appeal.

Without your support we would not be able to continue our work of protecting and promoting the family based on marriage and the welfare of children and young people.

Tributes to two faithful servants at annual conference

At the Family Education Trust annual conference in June, tributes were paid to Dr John Guly and to Peter Dawson, both of whom were laying down their respective responsibilities after many years of sterling service.

Peter Dawson

At the end of the day, Dr Trevor Stammers made a presentation to Mr Dawson on behalf of the Trust as a token of appreciation for his chairmanship during the afternoon sessions of the conference over a period of some 16 years. Those who have attended the meetings over the years will be familiar with the indispensable contribution Mr Dawson has made to the smooth running of the occasion and the firm, yet kindly and good-humoured way in which he has kept the assembled company in good order.



Peter Dawson OBE

John Guly

Earlier in the day, Simon Ling made a presentation to Dr John Guly who was retiring as a trustee after 20 years of faithful service. As a trustee, Dr Guly has represented the Trust at meetings in Parliament and elsewhere, served as a media spokesman and prepared media briefings on a wide range of topics.

Following the death of the Trust's founder, Dr Stanley Ellison, he served as acting chairman for a period of three years. Always a gentleman, we are indebted to him for his dedication, enthusiasm and sheer hard work.



Dr John Guly, with his wife Maureen

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