

1                                   A bill to be entitled  
 2           An act relating to the Florida Healthy Marriage  
 3           Handbook; creating s. 741.0307, F.S.; creating the  
 4           Florida Healthy Marriage Handbook; providing  
 5           requirements for the handbook; providing for  
 6           distribution of printed copies of the handbook under  
 7           certain circumstances; requiring clerks of court to  
 8           post electronic copies of the handbook on its website  
 9           and make the handbook available to certain applicants;  
 10          encouraging clerks of court to provide a list of  
 11          course providers and websites where certain classes  
 12          are available; amending s. 741.04, F.S.; prohibiting  
 13          the issuance of a marriage license until petitioners  
 14          verify that both parties have obtained and read the  
 15          Florida Healthy Marriage Handbook or some other  
 16          presentation of similar information; providing an  
 17          effective date.

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 19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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 21           Section 1. Section 741.0307, Florida Statutes, is created  
 22           to read:

23           741.0307 Florida Healthy Marriage Handbook.—

24           (1) There shall be created a handbook which includes  
 25           resources, information, and website links to assist in forming

26 and maintaining a long-term marital relationship. This handbook  
27 is supplemental to the Family Law Handbook created under s.  
28 741.0306.

29 (2) The handbook shall read substantially as follows:  
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31 Introduction

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33 Congratulations! You have made the decision to get married. This  
34 decision means that you and your partner agree to enter into a  
35 formal contract. This contract outlines the conditions of your  
36 new partnership. This partnership impacts the ownership of your  
37 money and possessions and the way you relate to each other. When  
38 you talk about your marriage expectations before getting  
39 married, you begin to understand the new roles and  
40 responsibilities. This mutual understanding helps to lay a  
41 foundation that can help you build a successful, enduring  
42 marriage.

43  
44 The purpose of this handbook is to provide information to  
45 marriage license applicants that can help to create successful  
46 marriages. It includes topics such as learning to communicate  
47 effectively, building the team, solving problems  
48 collaboratively, and resolving conflicts. The handbook also  
49 provides general information on economic issues, raising a  
50 family, and the consequences that occur when marriages fail.

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Building a Marriage

As you and your spouse begin your journey together, the first thing you will need to know is where you are going. Your shared destination is determined by your personal and shared values. The marriage journey will require lots of decisions from both of you. Through mutual respect, trust, honesty, and love, you will have a rewarding trip.

Understanding Your Values

Your values are the foundation for all of your thinking and decision-making. Every decision you make is an effort to align your actions to your values. When you marry, you will be sharing your life with another person. It is so important that you know your own values and the values of your intended spouse. Think about the values you consider sacred in your life and share this information with your partner.

Discuss these issues prior to making a marriage commitment. Build upon your mutual ideals. A harmonious, lasting marriage will be built upon a foundation of shared values and the effective communication of these values.

76 Building Your Team

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78 Marriage is a team effort. One of the definitions of the word  
79 team is "a group of persons pulling together." Talking to each  
80 other and sharing in decisions that affect both team members is  
81 very important. Talking, listening, and valuing your partner's  
82 ideas and contributions will make your marriage team strong and  
83 healthy.

84  
85 Learning Effective Communication

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87 Learning to communicate effectively requires commitment from  
88 both you and your partner. It takes time and LOTS of energy, but  
89 it is worth the effort. To commune literally means "to put in  
90 common; to share." The goal of effective communication is to  
91 create a common understanding with your partner. This common  
92 understanding is the cement of a strong marriage. Honesty is an  
93 essential component of effective communication. However, honesty  
94 must be tempered with kindness. Good communication between both  
95 of you promotes mutual trust and respect.

96  
97 Successful marriages depend on good communication between both  
98 partners. Learning to be a good communicator takes patience and  
99 practice.

100

101 Resolving Conflicts

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103 Another step in building a lasting marriage is learning to  
104 examine and confront issues effectively. Couples in the  
105 healthiest marriages experience conflicts. Conflicts are normal  
106 because you and your partner have different beliefs and  
107 opinions. Conflict is simply a clash between these beliefs and  
108 opinions. The cause of conflict is that you and your partner see  
109 and approach situations and events differently. Conflict results  
110 when there are opposite points of view and each person believes  
111 that their viewpoint is right, and their partner's viewpoint is  
112 wrong. The result is two different interpretations.

113

114 People in conflict are seldom upset about what they think they  
115 are upset about. One event may trigger an emotional outburst.  
116 The outburst often is caused by a series of unresolved issues. A  
117 win/lose situation will not solve the problem. Resolving  
118 conflicts effectively strives to achieve a win/win solution for  
119 both of you. How can you find an answer that benefits you and  
120 your partner? The first step is for the two of you to step out  
121 of the battle and look beyond the event that created the  
122 conflict. The next step is to shift your focus to your common  
123 interests, mutual values, and positive qualities.

124

125 Refocusing your own thinking helps to calm emotions. You can

126 redirect your thinking – and your partner's – to what you both  
127 really want: an activity or mutual goal, something more  
128 satisfying than the conflict. Couples can change their conflict  
129 experiences by changing their thoughts about the situation.

130

### 131 Keeping the Marriage Vital

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133 When you first get married, usually everything is new and  
134 exciting. But how do you keep your marriage new and exciting  
135 year after year? You have started a lifelong journey together.  
136 This journey will have many stops along the way. Each of your  
137 destinations will bring maturity to your relationship and to  
138 each of you. Your affection for each other increases through the  
139 lessons that you learn together and the laughter and the tears  
140 that you share. It is a good journey! Couples who can laugh  
141 together under challenging circumstances and gain the  
142 understanding of true friendship keep their marriage vital.

143

### 144 Addressing Economic Issues

145

146 As you prepare for your new journey as a couple, you have  
147 several financial issues to discuss. What financial resources  
148 and obligations do you bring into your marriage? Do you have  
149 business debts? Will you combine your finances and have joint  
150 checking and savings accounts or maintain separate accounts? Who

151 will pay the bills? Will you develop a budget together?

152

153 Talking to each other about how you plan to earn, spend, and  
154 save your money is easier when you agree on priorities. Your  
155 marriage benefits from forming and sticking to a spending plan  
156 that includes discussion and agreement.

157

158 Sharing Financial Responsibilities

159

160 It is wise to make major financial decisions together. You both  
161 will be responsible for those decisions. If you are  
162 uncomfortable at the thought of sharing financial  
163 responsibilities with your intended spouse, you might want to  
164 seek premarital counseling to determine underlying issues and to  
165 decide if marriage is the right decision for you at this time.

166

167 One of you may be better at balancing a checkbook, paying the  
168 bills, and developing a budget. As you take this marital journey  
169 with your partner, talk with each other about which one of you  
170 is best suited to do specific financial tasks. Then, after you  
171 are married, try out your new system! Adjust it if it doesn't  
172 work well.

173

174 Here are some specific financial planning tips. Decide together:

175

176 If you will maintain one joint checking account or separate  
177 individual checking accounts. Who will pay the bills and  
178 maintain the checking account(s)? How often and how much  
179 personal allowance each of you should receive. What is an  
180 appropriate savings and investment plan? How you will pay for  
181 large purchases such as automobiles and major appliances.

182

183 Building a Budget

184

185 Building a budget helps you to know how much income you will  
186 have, how much money you will spend, and how much money will be  
187 left over. It helps you to control your spending. A budget helps  
188 you to save money!

189

190 What are some steps to assist you?

191 1. Identify your financial goals: short range (e.g.,  
192 buying groceries and gasoline) and long term (e.g., buying a  
193 house, setting up a college fund for your children).

194 2. Look at your current financial position. What is your  
195 monthly household income? What are your debts?

196 3. Write out a monthly budget for 12 months. Write out  
197 monthly expenses in the different categories (e.g., \$300 car  
198 payment, \$600 rent). Estimate how much you will spend in each  
199 category.

200 4. Compare your budget to your financial goals. Is there

201 money left over after meeting your monthly obligations? If so,  
202 how much of the leftover money can be used for your goals? If  
203 you follow the budget you set up, how long will it take you to  
204 reach your goals?

205 5. Compare your actual costs to the costs you budgeted.  
206 Was your budget realistic?

207 6. Review and revise your budget. Stay on track toward  
208 meeting your joint financial goals.

209 7. Decide who will work, who will provide childcare, and  
210 who will obtain further formal education.

211 8. How much insurance will be necessary?

212  
213 It is important to make your budget realistic and flexible.  
214 Major categories of expenses are: rent or mortgage payment;  
215 utilities; food and household goods; clothing; healthcare;  
216 insurance premiums; tuition, charitable donations;  
217 transportation; household maintenance; credit card debt; hobbies  
218 and entertainment; vacation and holiday savings; and other  
219 expenses, such as cosmetics, hair care, veterinary fees (if you  
220 have pets), gifts, plants, and artwork.

221  
222 Certain budget items are fundamental expenditures or  
223 "absolutes", such as housing, food, and transportation. Other  
224 budget items are less important. Hobbies, vacations, gifts, and  
225 artwork are a lower priority than shelter and food. These are

226 "discretionary" expenditures. Prioritize your budget items,  
227 starting with "absolutes."

228  
229 Involve your spouse in major budget decisions. Talk together  
230 about the mutual benefit and impact of your budget decisions.  
231 For example, what should you do if one of you wants a new  
232 computer while the other wants new carpet, and there is money  
233 for only one of the two items?

234  
235 Which of the purchases is most needed and beneficial to both of  
236 you? What is the impact on the quality of your life together if  
237 you buy the computer? The carpeting? Set your purchasing  
238 priorities together. Be a team working towards your shared  
239 financial goals.

240  
241 Raising a Family

242  
243 Deciding to start a family is a BIG decision! The change you  
244 experienced when your household became two, triples with the  
245 addition of a child! Children bring great joy, sleepless nights,  
246 and new roles and responsibilities for both of you.

247  
248 Parenthood is a lifetime commitment. It requires emotional  
249 maturity from both partners. Raising children can be the most  
250 satisfying experience when both of you are ready to make this

251 unselfish commitment.

252

253 Taking Responsibility for Raising Children

254

255 The decision to have children needs to be mutual. Children bring  
256 an enormous change to your relationship with each other. Some of  
257 the spontaneity that you once had as a couple may change.

258 Fatigue from early childcare demands and feelings of uncertainty  
259 in your new roles can cause temporary marital stress. Career and  
260 childcare decisions, economic implications and new financial  
261 demands, and new housing requirements will need to be discussed.

262 But the joys of parenthood outweigh the tensions of change.

263

264 Raising a child is a team effort and requires both partners to  
265 be active participants. You are bringing into the world a new  
266 human being who will require your full support physically,  
267 emotionally, socially, instructionally, and economically. Both  
268 of you are responsible for your child's care. This mutual  
269 responsibility for the care of your child or children never  
270 ends. When you agreed to have a child, you signed on for life.

271

272 Coping with Family Challenges

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274 Sometimes raising children can be very difficult. You may find  
275 that you need help. Some children have problems making friends,

276 getting along in school, and staying out of trouble with the  
277 law. Family counseling can strengthen families by providing a  
278 safe place to explore issues and resolve problems.

### 280 Walking Rocky Roads

281  
282 If sad times start to outweigh happy times with your spouse, you  
283 are walking a lonely, rocky road in your marriage. Examine your  
284 own life, your spouse's life, and your relationship with each  
285 other. If you and your spouse can renew your love and commitment  
286 to each other, together you can remove the obstructions in your  
287 marriage. Professional counselors and/or members of the clergy  
288 may help you remove some of the boulders in your marriage path.  
289 Depending on the type of problems you encounter, you may find  
290 specific support groups and counseling classes to help you. Also  
291 refer to the phone book or online directories for listings of  
292 counselors, support groups, religious organizations, and other  
293 community resources.

### 295 Conclusion

296  
297 This free handbook is one way that the State of Florida is  
298 showing its support of your decision to marry. The information  
299 has been intended to be a basic roadmap to guide you. The State  
300 of Florida hopes that you have a happy and healthy marriage!

301  
 302 Again, congratulations!

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 304 (3) The clerk of the circuit court shall post an  
 305 electronic copy of the handbook on its website. Additionally, if  
 306 printed copies of the handbook are made available to the office  
 307 of the clerk of the circuit court, the clerk shall make the  
 308 handbook available to marriage license applicants. The clerk of  
 309 the circuit court is encouraged to provide a list of course  
 310 providers and sites where marriage and relationship skill-  
 311 building classes are available.

312 Section 2. Paragraph (b) of subsection (4) of section  
 313 741.04, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

314 741.04 Issuance of marriage license.—

315 (4) A county court judge or clerk of the circuit court may  
 316 not issue a license for the marriage of any person unless the  
 317 county court judge or clerk of the circuit court is first  
 318 presented with both of the following:

319 (b) A written statement that verifies that both parties  
 320 have obtained and read or otherwise accessed the information  
 321 contained in the handbooks ~~handbook~~ or other electronic media  
 322 presentation of the rights and responsibilities of parties to a  
 323 marriage specified in s. 741.0306 and 741.0307.

324 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.  
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