

By the Committees on Judiciary; and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; and Senator Baxley

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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 the circuit
8 court to post electronic copies of the handbook on its
9 website and make the handbook available to certain
10 applicants; encouraging clerks of the circuit court to
11 provide a list of course providers and websites where
12 certain classes are available; amending s. 741.04,
13 F.S.; prohibiting the issuance of a marriage license
14 until petitioners verify that both parties have
15 obtained and read the Florida Healthy Marriage
16 Handbook or some other presentation of similar
17 information; providing an effective date.

18
19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

20
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 your 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.

51

52 Building a Marriage

53

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

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59 have a rewarding trip.

60

61 Understanding Your Values

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

70

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

75

76 Building Your Team

77

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

86

87 Learning to communicate effectively requires commitment from

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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

102

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

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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

132

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

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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:

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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., buying
192 groceries and gasoline) and long term (e.g., buying a house,
193 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

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204 reach your goals?

205 5. Compare your actual costs to the costs you budgeted. Was
206 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. Other budget items are

225 "discretionary expenditures," such as hobbies, vacations, gifts,

226 and artwork are a lower priority than housing and food.

227 Prioritize your budget items, 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

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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.

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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

273

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.

279

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

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291 refer to the phone book or online directories for listings of
292 counselors, support groups, religious organizations, and other
293 community resources.

294
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!

303
304 (3) The clerk of the circuit court shall post an electronic
305 copy of the handbook on its website. Additionally, if printed
306 copies of the handbook are made available to the office of the
307 clerk of the circuit court, the clerk shall make the handbook
308 available to marriage license applicants. The clerk of the
309 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

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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 ss. 741.0306 and 741.0307 ~~s. 741.0306~~.

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