

A Brief Explanation of the Thriving Couples Model Living As Roommates Vs. Husbands and Wives

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(To visualize the **Model** click [here](#) for a PDF graphic.)

The Development of the Model:

The **Model** arose after hearing from clients the stories of thousands of individuals and adults about their relationships. Most of these were married. Many were cohabiting or had cohabited before. Others were single or divorced, some several times. These people would tell me, often without prompting, the key elements that were missing in their marital or romantic relationships or the types of things they felt were important to making a marital relationship worthwhile. The six elements of the **Model** are the six things these people brought up in sessions, over and over again.

While some researchers might question the wisdom of creating a **Model of Marriage** from people who are hurting, I would counter, that people who are hurting know instinctively what is missing and can articulate very convincingly the things they need. A person in the desert knows he needs water to survive. A person who just finished a 32-ounce Coke may be upset because his iPhone doesn't have reception. They both need water to survive, but the person in the desert is much more aware.

Priorities in the Model:

As you look at the graphic of the **Model**, note that it is built from the ground up. The item lower on the graphic trumps the items above it. This is a very helpful way to understand, as a couple and a therapist, what priorities are needed to improve the marriage.

For example, **Commitment** trumps **Trust**: it won't matter if you are having an affair, if you are going to leave me. **Trust** trumps **Communication**: I won't believe a word you are saying if I think you are lying to me! **Communication** trumps **Sexuality**: Why would I want to be sexual with you if you never talk to me, or all you do is criticize me?

The Elements of the Model:

The **Model** has six layers with two concepts in each layer. The two concepts at each layer are complementary to each other and necessary to the complete understanding of that area. For example, we can't just **communicate**. We also need to be able to **solve our problems**. In addition, you'll note that all of the concepts at each level are interactive and dependent on the teamwork of both spouses. You don't **communicate** alone or you aren't **affectionate** alone. This helps couples see the character of their **Marriage** depends upon both of them working for the common good of the family the two of them started.

Marriage and Commitment:

When I use the word **Marriage** I'm referring to a husband and wife who have made a public pledge to leave their father and mother and start a new family. In my view, **Marriage** is NOT about loving, romantic relationships. Defining marriage as simply a romantic relationship has reduced marriage to feelings, leading to our horrendous divorce and cohabiting rates and encouraging anyone to be "married." This watered-down view has taken away from **Marriage** its intrinsic worth, and devalued it to the point where 50% of our married people throw theirs away. **Marriage** has historically meant the complementarity of a man and a woman, who are one in their uniquely, sexually, monogamous relationship, who promise in a public way their mutual commitment to each other in their new family. Their family has the potential to be intergenerational, forming the safest and most tender place for the next generation to be raised. Anything less reduces marriage to a loaf of bread: buy a new one if you feel like it.

Commitment is the idea that the vows of **Marriage** are continually reinforced throughout their lives together, because they've formed a new family. Neither partner does or says things to call their **Commitment or their new family** into question.

Cohabitation does NOT offer the security of **Married for Life** and because the couple doesn't know if either is in or out for sure, insecurity lurks beneath the scene. Married couples who threaten the **Marriage** by saying things like "I can't take this any more" or "I deserve to be happy," also create insecurity and if either party thinks the other might leave, they start protecting themselves from the other spouse. Either scenario (cohabitation or threats to leave) causes people to see their partner as their roommate instead of a husband or a wife, leading to marital problems and chaos and, for many, divorce or breaking up.

Trust and Accountability:

Trust is the idea that what spouses say matches what they do and they both keep appropriate boundaries with others. There is an invisible boundary around their marital

relationship and neither does anything to call that into question. In **Accountability** both partners willingly tell each other what is going on because they each want the other in his or her life! They do this because they want to compare notes and pool their wisdom and look out for one another. They can't protect each other, unless they both know where the other is.

Couples that don't practice this end up keeping secrets from each other and not telling each other what they need to, which introduces insecurity into the relationship and makes one or the other feel controlled or totally unimportant. This also leads to couples living as roommates. Roommates DON'T tell each other what is going on! Married people do, or at least should!

Communication and Problem Solving:

Wise couples will BOTH **Communicate** their concerns with each other and they BOTH will work together to **solve** both their concerns. No relationship is perfect and will need to be tweaked now and then. The relationship will not improve, if one or the other or both cannot or will not share their concerns or every time differences are brought up, anger, fighting, or shutting down are a threat. Couples who are not able to resolve their differences or at least work them through to a satisfactory level will find their relationship deteriorating over time. Couples who can't work through their differences become roommates and either fight or become indifferent. If the relationship can't get better it will get worse. Over time this can lead to **Trust** and **Commitment** issues.

Fun and Friendship:

Couples that enjoy their marriages enjoy each other's company and they enjoy each other's company because they spend time alone together and have a relationship on their own accord, apart from their children and/or friend or other family members. This is difficult to do in modern society due to our busy lives, but **Thriving Couples** understand this and will make special efforts to spend time alone as a couple, enjoying each other's company and developing their common interests throughout their lives together. Couples, who end up as roommates, develop their own individual private interests only and invest in their careers and children, putting each other on hold. Over time they will grow distant and, if they are not careful, will just pass each other in the hall. This lack of time and effort on both parties' part will be interpreted as an affront or indifference by each other and will bleed into other areas of the marriage, creating other, more serious problems. For example, why be married to someone who won't spend any time with me having fun?

Warmth and Affection:

Couples need **Warmth** and tenderness and one of the easiest ways to convey that is through **Affection**. By **Affection** I mean non-sexual, non-demand touching. There is a

public and private aspect to this. The public aspect conveys to the children and society at large and to each other that the two of them are an item. The children see mom and dad holding hands on the couch and giving each other a hug and a meaningful kiss at the end of the day. Privately the couple is close in the privacy of their own bed. Their bedroom is a sanctuary with a lock on the door. The couple cuddles, again, without sexual overtones, on a regular basis, keeping the relationship **Warm**.

Couples, who end up as roommates, avoid **Affection** and use excuses to keep from doing it. If one is more affectionate, that spouse may give up pursuing it because it doesn't seem reciprocal. Or one may say, I'm just not the affectionate type, leading to neither touching each other, publically or privately. **Affection** that is one-sided feels forced and lacks **Warmth** for both. The couple may rarely touch each other in bed (or anywhere else!), have a child or dog in the bed between them in bed or not sleep in the same bed at all! Without **Warmth** and **Affection** the relationship grows cold and it is not long before they are both living as roommates and the couple is dealing with many other problems as well.

Intimacy and Sexuality:

There are four purposes for **Sexuality**: 1) to bring the next generation; 2) to ensure the spiritual connection between a husband and wife; 3) as a creative force in our lives to be a blessing to our families and the wider community (e.g. work, art, service, giving, volunteering); 4) as spiritual energy directed toward God in worship. In any other contexts sexuality becomes a force of chaos, abuse, perversion and death.

The wise couple understands this and makes sure that the **Sexuality** between them has **Intimacy**, by which I mean it is mutual and meaningful. Without these two elements **Sexuality** feels forced or inappropriate or hurtful or selfish. On the flip side couples that ignore sexuality end up losing their love for each other as the spiritual energy between them leaks away. Still other roommate scenarios include one or the other or both getting their sexual needs meant elsewhere or the introduction of other people (e.g. swinging) or things (e.g. pornography) into the sacred marriage bed that is just meant for the husband and the wife. These extremes (coercion, indifference or perversion) cause couples to become roommates, raise marital problems in other areas and may lead to divorce.

Importance of the Model:

All the elements of the **Model** are necessary for a **Marriage** to be strong. Weakness in one area can quickly trickle into other areas. Just like a house wouldn't be much of a house if it is missing a roof or a furnace or a kitchen or windows, so, too, marriage without all the elements will suffer. The **Model** suggests starting with the most basic foundational area before working on the areas above it (looking at the graphic of the

Model: work on **Trust** before **Communication**, etc.). Knowing what the weaknesses are helps couples set their own goals as they seek to improve their marriages and can give them tangible places to start going forward. Marital therapists can use the **Model** to assess the couple and create therapy goals.

Other Issues and the Model:

Money and Children:

Most other issues (e.g. money and children) can be subsumed under the **Communication** and **Problem Solving** section. Nevertheless, any issue can become a **Marriage and Commitment** issue, if the couple can't work it through, one or the other makes threats to leave or, in frustration, either makes unilateral decisions. For example, quite often in cohabiting couples and step-family situations, money and children become **Commitment** issues! For example, in a step-family situation, if you don't warm up to my birth-child, I'll divorce you! YIKES! Unilateral decisions and threats to break up or divorce in these kinds of settings are common. The major concern here is "how" a couple handles their problems.

Protection:

When I was first thinking through the **Model** I considered having protection as one of the major components: safety first, right? After some reflection, I decided that protection is one of the assumptions and purposes of the family and it is germane to each level of the **Model**. We could speak of protection at each level. Protection is one of the key reasons the family exists in the first place. Protection will be a theme at each level as I write about and develop the **Model**.

Conclusion:

The **Thriving Couples Model** can help you as a couple determine areas that need work for you to make the most of your Marriage or your relationship. If you are a potential marital therapy client or marital therapist the **Model** will help you focus on priorities. The **Thriving Couples Model** provides a philosophy and a structure for improving your **Marriage**, when both parties realize you exist in the **Marriage**, not to make each other or yourselves happy, but to sacrifice for the benefit of your new family. Your family is bigger than either of you, is worth sacrificing for, and both of you are key players in making it all it can be.