

Topic: Marriage and Family

Let's get started... Are you married or single? Do you live with family members (husband, wife, children) or extended family members (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws)? What is a "family unit" in your native country/culture? If you are married, who chose your spouse (you, your parents, or a professional "matchmaker")?

Background:

The family unit, headed by a mother and father, is considered in many countries to be the "backbone" of society. Most countries in the world value strong families and strong communities. How families are formed can differ, but everywhere people accept the family unit as an environment for raising children. In some countries, marriages are arranged by parents, extended family members, or professional "matchmakers" consulted by the families. In other countries, young men and women choose their own spouses, sometimes freely, sometimes with the advice of their parents, and sometimes only with the approval and consent of their parents. There may be advantages and disadvantages to any of these systems. The traditions, rituals, and celebrations for getting married also differ from one country or culture to another. The laws about marriage and family also differ. For example, in some countries, a man may have more than one wife. In other countries, a man can have only one wife, and it is illegal to have more than one wife. The age at which young people can marry, with or without their parents' consent, may also be different in different countries, but one thing is certain – many people think that "love makes the world go 'round.'" Other people prefer to remain single and not marry. Some people who do marry don't get along, so they want to separate or divorce. Laws about divorce can also be different in different countries.



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In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

- What cultural differences have you noticed between marriage in your native country and marriage in the United States? What do you like, and what do you not like, about the differences?
- If you could design an ideal system for marriage, what would it be? Why?

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

What advice would you give to someone from your country who told you they want to get married?

What do you think are the positive and negative aspects of being married? Being single? Which do you prefer, and why?

How old are people usually when they get married in your native country? Do you think this is a good age? Why or why not? How old do you think people should be when they get married?

Does your country have a system of divorce laws? If so, what are the grounds (legally acceptable reasons) for divorce in your country?

Do you think marriage should be “for life” no matter what, or do you think divorce should be allowable in certain situations? Tell a partner your opinions and reasons.

What are some advantages and disadvantages of “easy” divorce laws?

What are some advantages and disadvantages of strict, or no-divorce laws?

How do you think divorce affects children? Do you think divorce is ever a positive thing for a child? Tell a partner your opinions and reasons.

How do you feel about inter-faith or multi-cultural marriages? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of marrying outside one’s own culture, race or religion?

Are inter-faith, inter-racial, or multi-cultural marriages common in your native country? What are some problems people face in your native country in such marriages?

Do you know anyone (friend, family member, or co-worker) who is in a multi-cultural marriage?

Do you think married people who are unable to have children should adopt a child? What do you think about inter-racial and inter-cultural or international adoptions? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to the child and the parents for such adoptions? Tell a partner your opinions and reasons for your opinions.

Do you know anyone (friend, family member, or co-worker) who has adopted a child from another country, culture or race)? What joys and challenges do they face?

New words and Idioms:

Family unit; spouse; matchmaker; backbone of society; environment; arranged; consulted; “love makes the world go ‘round;” get along; advice; positive and negative aspects; allowable; inter-faith marriage; multi-cultural marriage; inter-racial marriage; adopt; challenges.