

# Accompanying Couples over a Lifetime

## Retrouvaille

A programme of hope helping couples heal and renew their marriages. You can learn to forgive, trust, and love again, it is never too late.

[www.retrouvaille.org.uk](http://www.retrouvaille.org.uk)

## Marriage Care

Marriage preparation and support for engaged couples, and counselling for couples/individuals in relationship distress.

[www.marriagecare.org.uk](http://www.marriagecare.org.uk)

## Engaged Encounter

Marriage preparation weekends to help engaged couples get ready for their big day and their lifetime together.

[www.engaged-encounter.org.uk](http://www.engaged-encounter.org.uk)



## Two in One Flesh

Couple resources, books and online, based on Scripture, to aid growth in relationship with each other and with God.

[www.twainoneflesh.org.uk](http://www.twainoneflesh.org.uk)

## Teams of Our Lady

Marriage enrichment through grouping couples together for regular meetings, spiritual reflection and relationship enrichment.

[www.teamsgb.org.uk](http://www.teamsgb.org.uk)

## Marriage Encounter

Weekend retreat where couples rediscover their original dream, and deepen and enrich their relationship.

[www.wme.org.uk](http://www.wme.org.uk)

*"...pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament. In this regard, experienced couples have an important role to play... with the cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities."*

Pope Francis, The Joy of Love #223



## Stages in a Relationship

Although these stages suggest a chronological order, events in life can be more complex and sometimes throw people back to an earlier stage.

### Romance – becoming a couple

Relationships usually start out with romance, though in some cultures, for example, where a marriage is arranged, romance may come later.

At this stage a couple are building a sense of togetherness, so

differences and difficulties are often overlooked, even denied. Everything is perfect – it feels quite ‘unreal’ – and in a way it is. But couples need this intense phase, and if they do not build this ‘togetherness’, the relationship can run into difficulties very quickly.

### Reality – the differences start to appear

Reality hits eventually and partners each reconnect with the outside world and realise again they are two individuals with differences that need to be reconciled. It can be a disheartening time. Each partner has to adjust to the responsibilities, problems and complexity of living together. This includes learning how to compromise, manage conflict and work through differences.

It can be upsetting when a relationship begins to change. And if one partner begins to re-establish their independence the other may react by becoming overly demanding.

Partners who manage this phase will have a much better chance of developing the skills they need in order to deal with the challenges of the coming years.

### Power struggles – practising independence

In this stage, each partner’s need for independence grows as does a desire to get their own way, perhaps out of a fear of not being accepted or respected by the other. Arguments, blaming and criticism become more frequent and intense; conflict rises and is often focused on issues such as money, bringing up the children and who does what around the home.

This is a difficult stage for couples and a time when some relationships break down. But many couples work through this stage by coming to terms with their differences and finding ways of not letting their disagreements damage their closeness, even though they struggle to keep a sense of connection.

### Finding oneself – independence

The next stage is another difficult one for couples – when one or both partners are engaged in ‘finding oneself’ in some way again. The focus shifts away from ‘we’ - to ‘me’ as individuals each question: ‘Who am I?’ ‘What do I want?’ ‘What do I need?’

Couples often find this stage particularly stressful because they feel less connected and sense that they are drifting apart because both are doing their own thing. They may argue more and it is often at this stage that affairs can happen, and couples can separate.

### Reconciliation – working through

Couples who have weathered the difficult stages can accept the independence of their partner and still feel connected to them. As such, they focus on reconciliation as they work out a new sense of togetherness.

They understand each other better, are more accepting and tolerant of each other and feel committed. They see their differences as strengths and not as weaknesses in their relationship.

### Mutual respect and love – interdependence

Mutual respect and love is a stage that all couples aspire to. Each partner feels fully accepted by the other and they have reached a comfortable balance between being together and

their own individuality. Both partners are free to explore new ways of fulfilling themselves instead of pouring so much energy into the relationship.

### Growing Closer to God: At every step and new stage

“There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy. The love they pledge is greater than any emotion, feeling or state of mind, although it may include all of these. It is a deeper love, a lifelong decision of the heart.

Even amid unresolved conflicts and confused emotional situations, they daily reaffirm their decision to love, to belong to one another, to share their lives and to continue loving and forgiving. Each progresses along the path of personal growth and development. On this journey, love rejoices at every step and in every new stage.”

Pope Francis, The Joy of Love #163.

# Alliance of Catholic Marriage Organisations in England & Wales

The Alliance of Catholic Marriage Organisations exists out of a shared desire to be united around our service to the Church and our commitment to offer clearer, more joined-up pathways of support for couples. The Alliance recognises that this commitment is best achieved through the deepening of our relationships - not formal structures - but with the hope that a more visible display of our unity will be a blessing to the Church and the couples we serve.



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[www.allianceofcatholicmarriageorganisations.org.uk](http://www.allianceofcatholicmarriageorganisations.org.uk)