

# An Outline of the Marriage Care ‘Preparing Together’ Course

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## Introduction

The course is designed to run over a one-day session or in two separate sessions (i.e. one of 4 hours and one of three hours). At the heart of the Course is the idea of ‘Pinch-Crunch’, which reflects the growth that occurs in a relationship when a couple deals with issues of importance in a constructive and loving way. The course is based on research and the experience gained by Marriage Care over 70 years of counselling and preparing couples for marriage.

The course follows the Relationship Model beginning with a couple first getting to know one another, establishing roles and clarifying expectations as they settle into a stable, committed relationship. Problems develop (‘Pinch-Crunch’) and the course provides techniques for dealing with them in a constructive way that can strengthen, rather than weaken, their relationship. The Course concludes by looking at the sacramental nature of marriage and the importance the Church attaches to it. Couples are invited to consider the vows they will exchange and reflect on what they mean for them.

During the Course couples have an opportunity to think about what they are each bringing to their own, individual relationships and they each complete a ‘Sunshine Sheet’ during the course of the day in which they can demonstrate their admiration and affirmation of their partner. They exchange these at the end of the Course.

The Course is delivered through a PowerPoint presentation and each couple has a pack with exercises to complete. At the end of the Course they are given a pack of materials summarising the Course content and providing further information.

## 1. Luggage

The Course begins by explaining we each have ‘luggage’ which we bring into a relationship – our personalities, expectations, hopes, needs and fears. Some of this we will be happy to share others we are not so proud of. As a relationship develops each become more aware of what is in the other’s luggage.

## 2. Talking and Listening

The Course looks at different ways of talking and in small groups consider what helps me talk more openly and what helps me listen more clearly. The aim is to show that good communication and trust help to nurture intimacy.

## 3. Expectations

In our luggage we have expectations about how things will be – often base on how they were in our families of origin. We discuss some expectations – which are reasonable and which not? The point is we all have different expectations but cannot assume they are shared and so they are a potential area of conflict. The Course looks at how we can handle expectations well.

## 4. A Stable Committed Relationship

This is where couples are now. We invite couples to reflect on what it feels like and how important it is to them to maintain that before we go on to look at what happens when things go wrong.

## 5. Pinch Crunch

Using a simple game we show how minor niggles can cumulatively (if not dealt with) build up until a ‘crunch’ occurs. The key point is that if couples communicate how they feel about a niggle and agree how to resolve it, a crunch is avoided and their relationship is strengthened by dealing with the issue between them. Niggles left unresolved or brushed aside tend to weaken a relationship.

## 6. Negative Behaviours

When we argue (when a crunch occurs) we may behave in a particular way. Participants do an exercise to reveal which of Four Negative Behaviours they may tend to exhibit when they are angry (Escalation, Withdrawal and Avoidance, Invalidation, and, Negative Interpretation). Couples discuss between themselves and we look at what each means for a relationship. Their end of course hand-outs give some advice on how to deal with each type of negative behaviour.

### ***7. Stages of Negotiation and the Speaker-Listener Technique***

Returning to good communication, the Course provides a technique that enables couples to provide each with the opportunity of saying how they feel (i.e. about a pinch) and to ensure that they listen effectively so that each is understood - and knows they are understood. Once they understand each other they can proceed to negotiate a 'win-win' solution.

### ***8. Family of Origin***

Our families of origin largely determine our expectations of how our own families should be, but each partner will have different expectations. In this part of the Course couples look at their own families and what they think they did well or less well and what they want to bring into their family.

### ***9. What is This Thing Called Love***

Love as a word has many meanings; we explore with couples the nature of intimacy, which is more than the physical and sexual side of a relationship. We look at how sexual desire may change over time or for various reasons and how closeness can be maintained.

### ***10. The Sacrament of Marriage***

This part of the Course explains the Church's view of marriage and why it considers it important. We look at the nature of a sacrament and the indissoluble nature of marriage. We then go on to reflect on the meaning and significance of each of the vows.

### ***11. Conclusion***

Couples exchange their Sunshine Sheets, we review what we set out to do at the beginning of the Course and summarise the key things that happily married couples do.

Couples complete a course evaluation on-line and having done that can print out their certificates