



# Marriage Foundation

Press Release from Marriage Foundation

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## The secret to a happy relationship is going on ‘date nights’, finds new study

The secret to a happy relationship appears to be going on ‘date nights’, according to a major new study published today.

The study, *Date Nights Really Work!* from the Marriage Foundation finds that couples who regularly go on so-called date nights are more likely to stay together and are happier too.

Analysing data from the Millennium Cohort Study that tracked nearly six and half thousand couples whose children were born between 2000 – 2002, parents were first interviewed at nine months, then as their children turned three, five, seven, 11 and 14, it found that those who went on date nights were between 4 – 6 per cent more likely to stay together, once all other factors were taken into account.

“...Date nights when the child was aged 3 years increased the probability of staying together from 72 per cent to 76 per cent, a net gain of 3.8 per cent. Date nights at 5 years boosted stability from 75 per cent to 81 per cent, a net gain of 6.0 per cent,” the report says.

“Date nights at 9 months boosted the probability of later satisfaction by 5.5 per cent, at 3 years by 7.9 per cent, at 5 years by 7.7 per cent, and at 7 years by 6.5 per cent. These differences were all significant.”

The report continued: “Among couples who stayed together, date nights at any stage significantly increased the probability of reporting being very happy (rated 6-7 out of 7) when the child was aged 14.

“Date nights at 9 months boosted the probability of being very happy at 14 years by 4 per cent, at 3 years by 5.4 per cent, at 5 years by 3.7 per cent, and at 7 years by 6.5 per cent. Once again, these differences were significant.”

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation’s Research Director commented: “Our study analysed a huge amount of data from the national Millennium Cohort Study, allowing us to control for multiple variables, age, ethnicity, religion, wealth, education, jobs, relationship history and

so-forth to reach these ground-breaking conclusions. And while marriage remains the biggest indicator of family stability (plus 10-11 per cent) and happiness (plus 6-7 per cent), we can say with absolute certainty that date nights really do work.

"I hypothesise that the act of going out together, of making time for each other whether going out for a meal, popping to the cinema or similar reinforces the positive factors that brought the couples together in the first place. Basically, making time for each other keeps the passion alive."

The report found that the frequency of date nights varied little from 9 months to 7 years.

"Roughly two-thirds of couples went on some sort of date night while one-third didn't. Between 9 and 10 per cent went weekly, 29 to 33 per cent went monthly and 26 to 29 per cent went less often. Between 29 and 34 per cent of couples hardly ever or never went on date nights," it says.

"Couples who married before or after the birth of their child were more likely to go on date nights compared to couples who never married. This difference was especially pronounced when the child was aged 3 – 72 per cent for married couples and 61 per cent for never married couples – and age 5 – 71 to 73 per cent for married couples and 59 per cent for never married couples."

It also found that couples who were happier with their relationship soon after the child was born were also more likely to go on a subsequent date night. Seven in 10 (72 per cent) of the happiest couples whose children were three years old went on date nights compared to just half, (53 per cent) of the unhappiest. This figure was almost identical when the child reached five, 73 per cent of the happiest couples went on date nights compared to 56 per cent of the unhappiest.

The report concludes: "The fact that date nights have any significant influence on subsequent relationship stability, life satisfaction and relationship happiness is remarkable. It suggests that the wide range of factors already taken into account in my analyses are missing a key ingredient that is being picked up by the act of going on a date night.

"What I think a date night represents is a degree of intentionality about the couple's relationship. Going out on the occasional date together, without children, suggests couples recognise the need to keep the fire going in their own relationship. This intentionality has an important influence on the subsequent outcome of the relationship.

"In my PhD at the University of Bristol, I discuss the intent behind marriages in terms of whether couples 'decide' or 'slide' into marriage (Stanley et al 2006). This is a crucial factor in commitment. The big national surveys don't include any specific questions about commitment that might pick up this kind of intentionality. Maybe 'date nights' are picking some of it up."

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation's Research Director added: "As we celebrate Valentine's Day, we can say that date nights are a good way to support your relationship and will lead to stronger happier couples.

Sir Paul Coleridge, chairman and founder of Marriage Foundation, commented :  
"This very important research is all of a piece with our research into the real causes of marriage breakdown. That research shows that marriages do not in the main flounder because of "red letter" behaviour like serious abuse or unfaithfulness. By far the greatest causes of marriage collapse are boredom, inertia and disinterest. The antidote to this type of creeping termination is serious, regular investment, by both parties, of meaningful and exclusive time into maintaining the quality of your relationship, keeping the initial spark alight .

The essence of a so called "date night" is that a couple spend time together as a priority fixture in the diary and without distraction from others including children , indeed especially from children. But the good news is that children are primary beneficiaries of a parental relationship which is satisfying and fulfilling.

"injecting time not neglecting time" is key to a satisfying long term relationship."

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to editors**

#### **About Marriage Foundation**

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

Sir Paul Coleridge, Harry Benson and Michaela Hyde from the Marriage Foundation are available for comment and for interviews linked to these new findings.

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