

Now That It's Legal Unique Issues For Gay And Lesbian Couples

Marriage equality now extends across the entire country, bringing the freedom to marry to hundreds of thousands of gay and lesbian couples. To some, this opportunity may still not seem quite real—but it is.

If you are in a committed same-sex relationship (and your state hadn't previously legalized), you may have started getting questions right away from family, friends, and coworkers: "Well?? When's the wedding?" Some people may have been so excited that they deputized themselves as wedding planners! Of course, everyone means well, but at times, this can be overwhelming. Pressure to marry can be stressful for anyone, and for same-sex couples, there may be additional concerns.

Are We Ready?

In the rush to celebrate equality, some friends or family may not realize that, of course, a same-sex couples who appears somewhat serious may not yet be at a stage where they are ready to commit. The result can feel like a referendum on the state of your relationship.

Then there are issues of "coming out." If you are not out at work, to your whole family, neighbors, and so on, getting legally married may seem threatening—an official end to the closet. Sometimes, one member of a couple is ready for this and another is not. Even for people who *are* out, marriage may threaten fragile family truces.

Finally, for some people, marriage represents outdated ideas or has associations they dislike.

Planning the Wedding

Assuming you do make the decision to marry, what's likely to be foremost in the mind of many same-sex couples is the question of family. Even if your own immediate families are accepting, you may well have more distant relatives who you aren't sure about or who have not accepted who you are. How will you handle this, and do you invite them anyway? That's up to you, and your thoughts may be influenced by who is paying—but the issue may create some stress. However, it may be helpful to know that according to at least one study, opening up the subject of marriage can be helpful to same-sex couples who are trying to resolve family discord about orientation.

The question of which vendors to choose will also probably come up. Experienced couples and planners suggest making it clear that you are a same-sex couple from the start and gauging reaction. If you sense uneasiness, you may prefer to go elsewhere. Same-sex wedding planning directories such as [engaygedweddings.com](http://www.engaygedweddings.com) (<http://www.engaygedweddings.com>) and [gayweddings.com](http://www.gayweddings.com) (<http://www.gayweddings.com>) may be of help.

Beyond the Wedding Day

There is ample evidence that same-sex couples are more than capable of sustaining powerfully deep and loving relationships that last a lifetime. However, they do face unique issues that are different than those encountered by opposite-sex couples. On a practical level, you and your partner will want to ask yourselves questions like:

What about children?

If you don't already have children, do you plan to? If so, how will they be conceived? There may be deeply emotional feelings on this subject that have gone unexplored.

How will we handle money?

Traditional expectations for opposite-sex marriage (i.e., pooling funds) may not have seemed like they applied to you. Do they now? Of course, you'll also want to talk about how you'll handle debt, decide on spending, set a budget, and so on.

What are our roles?

As with any couple, you will want to discuss division of labor at home and work. But without traditional gender roles influencing you, the conversation may be both easier and more difficult.

How are we doing on "family"?

There may or may not be a lot to talk about and process as far as your families of origin. Many same-sex couples also have a "chosen family" of friends and loved ones. It may be helpful to talk about who you feel these people are and what they mean to each of you as you move into marriage.

Are there lingering issues of internalized homophobia?

Sometimes, couples find that formalizing their commitment for life and discussing issues like buying a home and having children brings up uncomfortable feelings they thought they had already processed. If this is an issue for you, it may be helpful to speak to a counselor who is well versed in LGBT issues.

Do we have anything else to talk about or work on before committing?

It's fairly common for heterosexual couples to take marital preparation classes or go through some type of premarital counseling before marrying. In the past, such classes may have felt inaccessible to you—but today, plenty of organizations are making their offerings fully inclusive of same-sex couples. In Florida, consider signing up for [SMART Couples in-person classes](http://smarcouples.ifas.ufl.edu/classesevents-/) (<http://smarcouples.ifas.ufl.edu/classesevents-/>) or the [Before You Tie the Knot online](https://reg.distance.ufl.edu/reg/Activity/Details/0EB1352F4896493CB0DAFE90652497D5) (<https://reg.distance.ufl.edu/reg/Activity/Details/0EB1352F4896493CB0DAFE90652497D5>) class. Some couples also opt for a brief round of premarital counseling—not necessarily due to problems, but to ensure that all is great before taking that big step.

Research shows that the physical and mental health improves when the rights of LGBT people are protected and they are protected from prejudice and discrimination. Marriage equality brings a wide variety of benefits to LGBT Americans that they were previously denied, potentially improving their health, happiness, and well-being. Of course, marriage isn't right for every same-sex couple, just as it isn't right for every opposite-sex one. But for many, this opportunity is a rich and rewarding one.

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