

Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a Judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, a newspaper editor, a women's editor and two writers. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors.

Carl E. - Mavis wants a long engagement. If she really loves me, why the wait?

Mavis R. - We need time to know each other better, and understand each other's needs.

Carl E. - After Mavis said "yes" to me, she seemed to have second thoughts about our marriage. There's no good reason why we can't be married in a few weeks, but she wants to set the date for eight months off. She thinks we'll know each other better then.

But how much more can we learn about each other that way? From what I've seen of engagements, she and I and our families will all be polite and on our best behavior. I'm sure Mavis loves me and I'm sure I love her. And I'm just as sure we can't learn anything more about each other than we know now, until we set up our own home and get down to everyday married life.

Of course, I'll agree to her wishes. So right there she's learning something about me. I'm a sofie when it comes to her.

Mavis R. - I think an engagement is a wonderful period and I don't want to skip it. It will give Carl and me an opportunity to get used to being together a lot. We can really concentrate on each other, without the distractions of housekeeping and bills and responsibilities. And it's a time for light-hearted fun and celebrating - the sort of gaiety we may never get a chance at again.

Carl E. is 27 and I'm 21. We met two summers ago as counselors at neighboring camps. From being mere acquaintances and friends, suddenly we have become lovers and prospective mates. I feel that calls for an in-between period of getting used to the idea, of making absolutely sure it's the real thing.

There are so many little things to iron out, and it's easier to deal with them before marriage. I don't know Carl's favorite color, for example, and he doesn't know I tune in to a 3 a.m. radio program!

The Council: Mavis is right in asking for a solid chunk of time in which to be engaged. But Carl is right in reminding her that, due to the best foot-forward stance, there are many things about each other they won't know until they've settled down for the long haul after the honeymoon.

So the question is: What can an engagement accomplish? (As to its length, Mavis might match Carl's yieldingness and shorten the eight-month stretch.) Let's skip discussing the fluff of it all - the parties, showers, trousseau-shopping which offer a once-in-a-lifetime whirl for Mavis. What long-range benefits?

First, they can take a long, hard look at each other in varied settings, different seasons, and under broad - day-light stresses as well as whispering pines. How does Carl take sudden disappointment? How does Mavis react to unfair provocation? The rose-colored glasses may still be worn, but more of the true nature of the prospective mate can be observed than was possible in the moonlight at camp, or the fraternity banquet at the Waldorf.

Then, there's time for working out a broad blueprint for the merger. Mavis and Carl did not grow up next-door. Each must learn and try to fit into the other's "way of life." This takes a lot of finding-out, and it must precede such decisions as Where to live, What furniture to buy, Who handles the money, How about in-laws, etc. Each says: "I'm this way. I can change a little. What crutches shall I give up for the great advantage of a shared life?"

Thus, engagement can make this pair more sure of their love. If, perchance, it works the other way, what a blessing to avoid the lacerating heartbreak of a miserable marriage! (A free pamphlet, "Before You Marry," is helpful. It is available from The American Institute of Family Relations, 5287 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles 27, Calif.)

Will he love her in December as in the month of May? Mavis wants an engagement to find out.

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