



STAY
happily married
.com

Is a Marriage Workshop For You?

This is episode #111 of Stay Happily Married, "Is a Marriage Workshop For You?"

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen:

I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I have here in the studio with me Natasha Crawford. You've met Natasha before; she's been on at least one of our shows back not very long ago. She works extensively with couples on repairing broken relationships. Her previous experience as a teacher has also given her a lot of insight on how problems in the marriage impact kids outside of the home.

She's a North Carolina marriage and family therapist associate and a certified Prepare-Enrich counselor. She's got a private practice in Raleigh, North Carolina. She's also the founder and program director of the Marriage Academy.

Today we're going to really dig in and learn some things about marriage workshops and we're going to cover some of the more popular curriculums that you've probably heard about as well as how they differ from the traditional one-on-one counseling.

Natasha, I am really excited to have you back. How are you doing today?

Natasha Crawford: I am wonderful. Thank you for having me back.

Lee Rosen:

Well, you know, this is a topic that I really want to dig into because I think a lot of people think about going to counseling in the traditional way but they also hear about all of these different

marriage weekends and workshops and group sessions. And we've done shows about some of them in the past and I want to kind of dig into that because I'd really -- for me, anyway, I'd like to know, and I suspect a lot of people would as well.

Before I jump right into it, let me ask you. You're doing this; what caused you to start facilitating marriage workshops? What got you interested in it?

Natasha Crawford: Well, doing therapy is one thing. That's more couples in crisis. For me, I'm really a big proponent of people taking a proactive approach to their marriage. And the best way to do that is do some learning on the front end. They always say, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Well, in my private practice, that's the pound of cure; long-term couples in crisis tend to be.

But if you can go to a weekend workshop, a little two-hour something to just get a couple of tidbits, a couple of nuggets that you can take back to your marriage that's doing fairly well that you just want to enhance or learn some new things, that's the way to go.

Lee Rosen: So do you think of this workshop format as being more for people that aren't in too much trouble yet? Is that who they're usually aimed at?

Natasha Crawford: I think for me, for the ones that I do, yes. There definitely are some workshops that are for couples who are deciding do we stay or do we go? But the ones that I'm doing are primarily for those couples who are in what they would consider an okay place. Maybe they're on autopilot and they're deciding, "You know, let's rev some things up. We need to learn something."

Or they're about to have a life transition; so they're about to have a baby, there's about to be a money transition, parents are about to move in the house, and so just trying to figure out, "Okay, how do we do our marriage with this new thing that's coming up?"

Lee Rosen: I mean, just reality -- and you're the expert. You're the one dealing with people that are going through this. But it seems to me that if everything's going swimmingly and we're doing great, we're not calling you. I mean, we've got to be having some issues before we're even flipping through Google looking at workshops and --

Natasha Crawford: Exactly. Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. So who are the people that are coming to you? Where are they when they usually -- when they call you?

Natasha Crawford: They're at that place where they're noticing that things aren't where they used to be. They say that couples tend to live on average six years unhappily before they will go and seek someone out. I think that's ridiculous. If you've been unhappy for a year or two years, okay, you know what? Let's try something. It may not be that we need therapy and counseling -- and there's a big stigma attached around those words -- but maybe we should go to a workshop. Because you know what? Things aren't the way they used to be and we want to learn some new things.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, we did a show not very long ago about PAIRS.

Natasha Crawford: Yes.

Lee Rosen: You've heard of that model. And I've heard good things about that, I guess. What is the deal with PAIRS? And I assume that's not what you're doing. You have your own name for the thing you do. What do you call yours?

Natasha Crawford: The Marriage Academy.

Lee Rosen: Okay. The Marriage Academy.

Natasha Crawford: Yes.

Lee Rosen: And so what's the -- well, first of all, let me ask you first what the Marriage Academy is and then we'll sort of contrast it to some of these other things I've heard about. What's the Marriage Academy?

Natasha Crawford: Well, the Marriage Academy is an initiative or a program that I've set up just as a way to house all of these different workshops and classes. So to start off we've got Intro to Marriage and that's the marriage preparation class for engaged couples. And then for couples who have been married and then couples who are about to have their first baby or go through all of those transitions that we mentioned earlier.

I do use the Prepare-Enrich program for the assessment piece of that program and that is very similar to PAIRS and the RELATE program. So all of those different assessment tools are ways to give us information about the couple so that we can figure out the best way to help them.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And so how is what you're doing different from something like PAIRS? Or are they a lot alike?

May 17, 2010 - Is a Marriage Workshop For You?

Natasha Crawford: They're very much alike; they're just different programs, different types of assessments that were created by different individuals.

Lee Rosen: Right. Everybody's got their own I guess little variation on the theme.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So somebody is interested in calling you. I'm realistic; they're not calling you unless things are a little off the rails. They're not listening to this show unless things are not feeling quite the way that they had hoped that they would be.

So give me a feel for when I call you and I come to the Marriage Academy, what is it going to be like to get to jump into one of these programs? How many people are going to be there? How long is it going to take? What's it going to be like?

Natasha Crawford: Well, if you come for the Advanced Techniques class, that's going to be a two-weekend back-to-back workshop up to 10 couples. That's where you do the couple checkup assessment, which is another part of the Prepare-Enrich program, so that way I can get a sense of where you are, what your strengths and weaknesses are as a couple, so that we can tailor the weekends to the different couples that are in the room.

Lee Rosen: So you already know a lot about all of the couples that are in the workshop before we even get to the workshop.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly. They do an online assessment before they even come in. And that way I can get a sense of who's having issues with what thing. Is it communication? Are they struggling with money issues? What's going on in their relationship? So that way we can tailor the workshop just for those people in the room.

Lee Rosen: Do you ever -- in that Prepare-Enrich process before the workshop, before the academy, do you ever find that this couple maybe isn't right for -- that they need to do something different?

Natasha Crawford: Sometimes that is the case where you can get the report back and it's like, oh, you know what? A workshop may not be the thing for them. It may be that they need counseling more long-term.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. So you know a little bit about us. We're going to show up for this Marriage Academy weekend. How many people are there and what's it going to feel like?

Natasha Crawford: It's going to be between 3 and 10 couples, just depending on the size and who signs up at that particular time. Two weekends, early in the morning from 9:00 to 12:30, two Saturdays back-to-back. So that way when you come in, the first thing we're doing is talking about the assessment, how that was, and jumping straight into learning different techniques, communication, talking about money, talking about children, all of the things that they're struggling with at that time.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, that's interesting. When I was talking to someone about the PAIRS program I got the sense that they went all day. And I know for me, after lunch I'm shot out. I mean, I do like the idea of doing it more than one morning and not doing it all in one day.

So am I going to have to tell all of my personal stuff? I mean, is my wife going to be saying in front of the group, "Yeah, he's not very good in bed," or whatever it may be? Because that would be a turn-off for me.

Natasha Crawford: As it would be for --

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I might like to hear about somebody else's, but mine I'd just as soon keep at home.

Natasha Crawford: Well, one of the rules that we kind of put out there at the outset is, one, whatever is said in here stays in here. And the couples kind of have to agree to that, that they won't go out and share with the world what they've learned about other couples. And one of the other rules is that before you speak on behalf of you and your spouse you kind of check in with one another to make sure that it is okay to share.

It's not where everyone has to speak. You can be that quiet person or that person that is taking in the information and needs to process it over the course of the week. Or you can be the talker. So there's room for every type of personality in the workshop.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. And so these are folks that are not in deep, deep, deep crisis.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: So what do they expect? What should they expect? You were having some issues. You've spent some time in the Marriage Academy. What kind of outcome are we looking for? How are we going to know it worked?

Natasha Crawford: It takes a little bit of time. You will have hopefully learned something new. You will have learned something new about yourself, something about your partner, something about the relationship. A lot of it won't be new stuff. "Okay. We knew we had communication problems." Well, you're coming to learn how to communicate a little bit better. Well, you knew you had money problems or that you had disagreements in terms of how to discipline or raise the children in terms of religion.

But when you come here to the academy, to the workshops, it's about, okay, how do we figure out how to fix those issues, how to talk about them in a new way? You may not come to an agreement right then and there, but at least you've gotten to a place where you can at least open the dialogue.

Lee Rosen: That makes sense. Now, the Marriage Academy is not just for people that are having issues in the marriage or some level of dissatisfaction, but the Marriage Academy also has programs for people that have not yet gotten married -- for premarital programs, right?

Natasha Crawford: Yes.

Lee Rosen: What's that all about? I think that would be like the ultimate wedding gift -- or engagement gift I guess would be the right time. But tell us about that.

Natasha Crawford: Well, it's called Intro to Marriage and it is what it sounds like. We want to help couples set a solid foundation. It's all about building your marital house on a solid foundation and making sure that you've had those conversations that need to take place.

So many of the young couples that come into my office -- one of the first things I'll ask is, "Well, what did you expect when you walked down the aisle? Did you talk about where you wanted to live and what your career goals were and how many children you wanted to have and all of these other topics?" And they look at each other and say, "No."

Lee Rosen: Right. It never occurred to us to --

Natasha Crawford: No. It never occurred to us to talk about what we were going to do once children entered the mix. And so to be able to have those conversations on the front end and flesh all of that out makes a whole lot of sense, as opposed to waiting until it happens and

thinking, "That's how you want to raise children? That's not how I want to raise children."

Lee Rosen: Right. I never would have married you if I had known that.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly. Or we would have been able to come to some sort of compromise so that when it does happen we can do it --

Lee Rosen: Now, is that also a few Saturdays? Is that how that's formatted?

Natasha Crawford: Yes. That's a double Saturday as well. And so that way, during the course of the week they can have an opportunity to have some of those conversations and extend some of the conversations that happened in that first Saturday.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, I would imagine -- you correct me if I'm wrong, but I would imagine at those pre-marriage Marriage Academy programs there's more laughing than crying, right?

Natasha Crawford: Yeah. They're happy. It's more about pulling them back down to earth because they're all excited about being married and planning the wedding and all of that. So it's very happy. It's a very happy time.

Lee Rosen: Okay. But what about the programs for people that have been married for a while? Is there more laughing or crying at those?

Natasha Crawford: I don't know about crying but it's definitely a different feel because these are people who have been married for two years, five years, however many years they've been together. So there's a different energy that goes around a couple that has been married, and possibly has children, as opposed to a young couple with or without children who are planning to get married.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Natasha Crawford: It's just a different energy.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I'm sure it's a very different feeling. So if I'm listening today and I'm thinking about, "Gosh, do I want to go to a Marriage Academy program with a group, or do I want to just do the traditional approach and come see you with my spouse, do the counseling?" At some level it feels to me like the Marriage Academy would be fun and it would be interesting and all that.

But if I really want to get serious and want to move forward in a hurry, which is -- for me, anyway -- the way I always want to do

everything, that having you one-on-one with me and my spouse is like we get a full dose of you and your help versus being in a group where we're getting one-twelfth, or whatever, of your attention. I mean, how do you decide which way to go?

Natasha Crawford: It's a personal decision for the couple. They have to decide which one is better for them. They may go to a workshop -- maybe not necessarily the weekend one but one of the little two-hour workshops that I will be starting to offer in the fall -- and say, "You know what? We have other issues that we need to talk about. Let's go see her for some deeper stuff."

Lee Rosen: Right. So it might be that you'd end up doing both really.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. So what is going on at -- the website is MarriageAcademy.net. What have you got happening at the website? Tell us about that.

Natasha Crawford: It's just a host of information about all of the classes that the Marriage Academy is offering. We talked about the Intro to Marriage and the Advanced Techniques; those are the two that happen over the two Saturdays.

And like I said, coming up in the fall will be what I called the Marriage And series, so that's marriage and money, marriage and first baby, marriage and infidelity, marriage and -- the whole host of things -- marriage and your aging parents. So any sort of life transition that might cause a little hiccup in the relationship that you want to prepare for.

"Oh, yeah. My mom is getting a little bit older and we're trying to figure out whether or not she should move in with us or whether or not we're going to put her in a retirement community. Let's be in a place with other couples who are struggling with that same issue and talk to someone who can tell us about how that may affect our marriage. Let's go for it."

Lee Rosen: Maybe the president needs to come to your --

Natasha Crawford: That would be excellent.

Lee Rosen: Marriage and the mother-in-law living with you in the White House.

Natasha Crawford: That's right.

Lee Rosen: That would be a small group that's having that problem, but -- yeah. Very interesting. I can think from the letters we get at this show, maybe marriage and she doesn't like to sleep with me often enough would be a -- that would be -- we get a lot of letters about that one.

Let me ask you, if you want to do one of these workshops -- you want to come to the Marriage Academy and do one of the multiple Saturday deals -- give me a feel for what that ultimately costs a couple. Money is tight today. What are you going to spend on that?

Natasha Crawford: Well, the two Saturday workshops are \$395 and you get the two Saturdays full on. There's a Skype session with me in the week in between because I figure during that in between you're having a lot of conversations about the stuff that happened that first Saturday.

Lee Rosen: Be talking about what she said but I didn't agree she could say.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly. So you get to have a Skype conversation with me two-on-one. A marriage resource guide that has a host of resources for couples in the community. So if you need information about an attorney to do your will because now you're thinking, "Oh, yeah, we need to do one of those." A massage therapist to do couples massages. A financial planner because your money isn't in order.

Lee Rosen: Right. It starts raising all those issues.

Natasha Crawford: It starts raising all of those issues. And so to be able to give them resources like that that are in the community so that they don't have to go searching for them once they've left and they're filled with more questions than they came with, to be able to offer that as well.

Lee Rosen: Right. I think that mid-week check-in is probably pretty valuable. Most people probably think, "Yeah, we need a little help here on Wednesday to get through until next Saturday.

Natasha Crawford: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Because you do. You're stirring the pot. Very interesting. Is there anything else we ought to know about the Marriage Academy?

Natasha Crawford: It is just getting underway. And like I said, in the fall we will start that Marriage And series; those are going to be two-hour quick workshops, sometimes paired with me and another professional.

So if we're talking about marriage and money then there may be a financial advisor, financial planner in the room with. So that way I can talk about the emotional aspects of money and how it affects

marriage and relationships and communication and all of that, but then where my limitations lie in talking about the actual planning, you can have someone right there and that person can talk with you about that.

Or marriage and first baby, having an OB/Gyn right there to talk to you about what's going to happen and the changes and the hormones and all of that, that can have an emotional effect on the relationship.

Lee Rosen: Oh, I know.

Natasha Crawford: As she's going through physical hormonal changes, it's not you, it's the hormones.

Lee Rosen: Right. That's right. It's not you. Yeah. Natasha, thank you so much. I'm really fascinated by what you're doing and I really appreciate you coming by and filling us in on it. Thank you.

Natasha Crawford: Thank you for having me again.

Lee Rosen: You can find out a whole lot more about the Marriage Academy. I'm going to give you three websites and a phone number that you can visit. And I'll put links to these in the show notes, of course.

You can get class descriptions, dates, all of that for Marriage Academy at MarriageAcademy.net. You can also learn a lot more about Natasha and her counseling services by visiting the website for her practice; that's NatashaCrawford.com. You can also check out her blog. And the blog is at NatashaCrawford.blogspot.com. That's a lot to remember but I promise you I'll put it right there in the show notes at Stay Happily Married.

If you'd like to get a hold of Natasha, her office number is (919) 807-1156.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope that you will join us again next week. In the meantime, keep the comments coming. The suggestions are fantastic. The feedback is very, very helpful and we really appreciate it.

You can reach us by calling our comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

May 17, 2010 - Is a Marriage Workshop For You?

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the Web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.