7) Continued

to know how these things are going to impact you financially. The financial decisions that you make affect all areas of your lives. Make sure you have a plan that you both agree on and can stick to. It is better to have a plan in place that can be modified as time goes on than to not have a plan at all.

8) Protect the Love of Your Life

Now that you have gotten married, you have each other to protect from the bumps in the road. One of the last things newlyweds think of is the possibility of their new partner passing away in the future. But the reality is that life happens and we can protect ourselves from the financial hardships that disability and death bring to our lives. Consider speaking to a financial planner about the different ways to protect life and income for the two of you, especially if children will enter the picture soon.

You don't need to make a big thing of it. There are just two documents that should be produced in order to protect your spouse from potentially damaging financial repercussions: a will and sufficient life insurance. Preparing a will makes it clear who will inherit your estate, and life insurance helps ensure your spouse doesn't find him or herself unable to meet your formerly joint financial obligations if you're gone. What exactly goes into your will and how much life insurance you need depends on your individual circumstances. Talk to a financial planner or estate lawyer for help on this.

If you already have any of these in place, make sure you change the name of the beneficiary to your spouse. Many newlyweds can overlook this and regret it if something happens in the future. The point here is not to be morbid or pessimistic; it's to create the most financially stable situation for your new life together. When you get right down to it, it's not even about money. Taking all of these steps to secure your financial future can help you on the road to creating a low-stress, high-happiness life together—and that is romantic.

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Financial Advice for Newlyweds

David White & Associates

Many couples will tell you that money is one of the biggest causes of arguments in a marriage. If you want both wedded bliss and a healthy bank account, start your life together on the same page. This advice may seem simple, but following it is more complicated, so stick to a few rules and you'll reap the rewards in no time.

1) Talk About It

Practice saying this phrase: "Let's talk about it." Unfortunately, many couples leave financial discussions for some future time when they become unavoidable—- in a crisis, or when someone makes a major purchase solo, or when long-buried debt suddenly comes to light.

Money can be an awkward topic. It's personal and the very opposite of lovey-dovey. But the time to talk is now. The glow of your new life together can actually help here, since you may be more inclined toward financial compromise or a general generosity of spirit than later on, when life goes back to being life with all its stresses and distractions.

2) Disclose Everything

Hopefully, you and your new spouse tell each other everything—- or just about. And hopefully you at least tell each other all of the important stuff and will continue to do so.

If you have financial skeletons, disclose them completely, and right away. Are you in debt? Do you have a bankruptcy in your past? Can you no longer afford the car you drive but can't bear to part with it? Even basic, neutral fiscal traits ought to be shared in order to avoid major conflict down the road. What's your money personality? Are you a spender? A saver? Do you lean toward the risky or the safe side on the investment spectrum? Do you live within your needs? These things will come out, so there's no point in keeping them secret. Reveal them now, when "How could you hide that from me?" is not part of the discussion.

3)Create a Budget

Now that you've tied the knot, you have two incomes and a shared household.

- Sit down with your spouse to devise a monthly budget for running your new partnership. Use spreadsheets to record your incoming wages and savings and your outgoing expenses.
- Designate your inflexible bills, such as mortgage or rent, utilities, installment loans and credit card payments, to be paid first.
- Then, consider your flexible expenses such as food, entertainment, insurance, pocket cash and savings. Work out a budget.

4) Choose the Bill Payer

After you have worked out your monthly budget, decide who will be the primary bill payer. The primary bill payer also takes responsibility for balancing the checkbook and knowing how much money is in the joint bank account at any given time. Having one person control the output streamlines confusion, makes bill paying orderly and timely and reduces the potential for fights over money. This may be a snap to decide if one of you is more organized or better with finances, but if you fuss and fume over your spouse's spendthrift habits, or one of you wants to save money by cooking at home while the other craves the fun of eating out, you might need to sit down with a financial planner who can help you prioritize where your money goes and decide who will manage the bills so that both of you are happy.

5) Get Rid of Debts

Starting a marriage debt-free is ideal but, alas, unrealistic. You probably have debt from your wedding, school loans or credit cards. Start by paying off each credit card one by one.

- Pay off either the card with the highest balance or highest interest rate first, while paying the minimum on the other cards.
- For school loans, investigate loan consolidation options, which may lower your payments and allow for one convenient payment.
- Devise a plan for short-term debt, such as cutting expenses or taking a part-time job temporarily to pay down your balances.

6) Start Saving

It's true that you should have several months of living expenses in savings, because you can't predict job loss, illness or other circumstances that wipe out incoming cash.

- Set aside a portion of your income every month for an emergency savings account. This should be between 3-6 months of basic expenses.
- Participate in your employer's 401(k) retirement plan; employers often match your contributions, which is free money for you.
- Open IRA and Roth IRA accounts and contribute whatever you can. The long-term impact of opening a retirement account in your 20s or 30s is strong, as compound interest accumulates over the decades until you retire.

7) Have a Plan

One of the biggest mistakes that we see is that people do not plan for their future until it's too late. It is never too soon for couples to sit down and discuss their financial goals. Whether you plan on buying a new car, a new home, start a family, you need