

# Anxiously Engaged

## Supplemental Lesson

### Couple Council

#### Introduction

Much has been said about the process of councils in many forms in the Church, in other organizations, and in the family. This lesson is about the particularly powerful and important council of spouses.

#### Believe in the Power of Councils

**Elder M. Russell Ballard has especially taught about the power of councils:**

*“I believe councils are the most effective way to get real results. Additionally, I know councils are the Lord’s way and that He created all things in the universe through a heavenly council, as mentioned in the holy scripture. (See Abraham 4:26; 5:2–3.)*

*“...[The] most basic and fundamental—and perhaps the most important—of all councils [is] the family council.*

*“Family councils have always been needed. They are, in fact, eternal...[The] Lord has provided... the council system to strengthen, protect, safeguard, and nurture our most precious relationships”*  
*([“Family Councils, General Conference, April 2016”](#))*



Marriage experts also recommend this kind of regular counseling together as husband and wife, though they may call it different things. We call it **Couple Council**.

Couple Council can be formal or informal. Elder Ballard said simply, “When a husband and wife talk to each other, they are holding [a] council.” ([Ensign, 2003](#)) It’s important to have on-going organic communication and decision-making processes, and to trust each other to make less important daily decisions without a formal council meeting. But, it’s also important to have a regular, predictable time set aside and guarded to be intentional about discussing your shared vision, coordinating plans and efforts, resolving concerns, etc.

It’s a very healthy communication practice to have a designated safe time away from any particular moment and set up without distractions to talk through relationship dynamics and hear each other’s hearts. It’s also helpful to have consistent time to be able to look ahead to upcoming experiences and prepare well together.

Couple Council might include both daily chats and more structured weekly conversations. It can also be good to reserve a more lengthy planned time to counsel together every few months or at a regular time each year (what some might call a “quarterly retreat” or “annual summit”) for assessing your shared life more broadly and making bigger, long-term plans.

The important thing is to be wise stewards over the precious relationship and life that you share in marriage. Counseling together to create and design your life is an important part of becoming one.

## Activity #1:

Take a minute to ask each other the following questions:

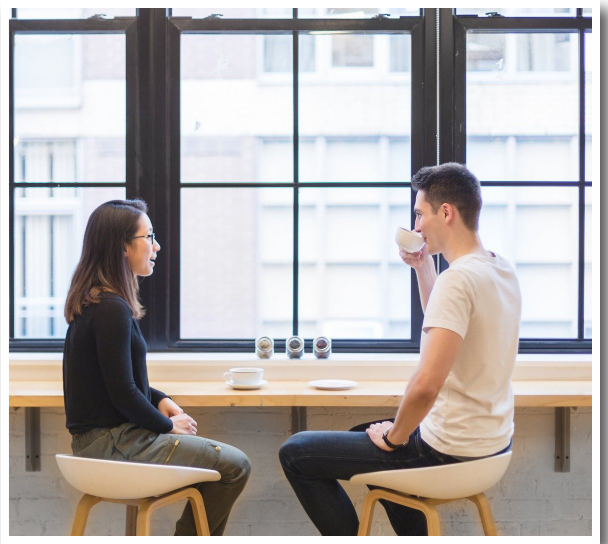
1. What are your thoughts about Elder Ballard's advice on Couple Councils?
2. Did your parents have Couple Councils when you were growing up?
3. How do you feel about the idea of Couple Councils for our marriage?

## Be Intentional about Your own Couple Council

As you decide together how you would like your own Couple Council to work, here are a few things to consider.

### When & Where

**Regularity is important.** Whatever timing you decide works best for your council, do it consistently. That will help you keep to it.



A time and place where you can feel comfortable and free to discuss openly is important, when you are not overly tired or rushed or distracted by anything else (including children, electronics, etc.)

### Remember President Nelson's admonition:

*"Husbands and wives, learn to listen, and listen to learn from one another. ... Taking time to talk is essential to keep lines of communication intact. If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time! Yet less important appointments are often given priority, leaving only leftover moments for listening to precious partners"* ([Conference, April 1991](#))

### How

**Having a clear process you can follow is helpful.** Beginning a council with prayer is an important part of the process. You might also consider having a preparation moment where you separately take time to think through what you plan to discuss, be open to personal inspiration, and get ready to share together. And some couples find it helpful to use writing, keeping a log or journal of couple councils to remember decisions and track growth over time.

As you decide about your own process, you might set some "ground rules" about things like turning off media and guarding your set time carefully (not skipping it easily, keeping it as fixed a part of your week as you do going to church, etc.)

You might also have some “rules of engagement” about remembering unity and making decisions as equal partners, respecting agency and differences compassionately, using good listening skills and creative problem solving. (There is another supplemental lesson on Creative Problem solving ([link here.](#)) Good Couple Council requires a great deal of vulnerability and humility, so be specific about how you will make a safe place for that in your process.

## What

### Decide which of many topics you will cover in your Couple Council.

You may have a few standard items you cover every week, some topics you touch on less frequently, and some that you want to discuss routinely, but at separate times. For example, a financial council may be at a different time and place than other topics. Some other areas you might consider including:

- Celebrations (highlighting the good)
- Relationship Dynamics (refining things like communication, sex, mutual support, etc).
- Personal Connection and Development (encouraging each other’s personal growth)
- Vision Alignment (long-term shared goals for marriage and life)
- Coordinating, Planning, and Prioritizing (scheduling and decision making)

## Activity #2: Have a Couple Council

**For your council this time, discuss these questions and make decisions about your councils going forward.**

1. How often will we counsel formally together? Do we want a specific structure for daily, weekly, or other times?
2. Do we want any special councils for different topics, like financial meetings or annual goal setting, etc.?
3. How formal do we want to be? Do we want written council notes in any format?
4. How will we guard time to counsel together?
5. Do we want any ground rules for our council? (Phones off, no skipping, etc)
6. What will we discuss? Are there some standard items we will always cover weekly, any we want to plan less frequent but regular times to talk about? Are there any of the above areas we want to include (celebrations, relationship dynamics, etc.)

(After you have discussed these questions, if you would like more ideas for some of the above areas, see the list at the end of this lesson.)



## Learn from Others

As you continue to develop a Couple Council that works for you and persevere in your efforts, you can find encouragement and new ideas from other couples who have found power in counseling together.

### One blogger expressed her gratitude for couple councils:

*"One of the things that I think [has] been so good for our marriage is our weekly councils.*

*I used to fight the idea of having a weekly meeting. I'm not really sure why I was so reluctant to try it...but I finally came around. So every Sunday after church and after we've had lunch, we have our weekly council meeting.*

*We have a special journal that we use. It's a safe place for us to bring up any issues that have been bugging us. I love that we can talk about anything. Sometimes we don't have anything to say as far as issues go, but it's the perfect time to touch base and discuss our goals for the week. We also talk about our progress on our goals from the previous week.*

*I feel like our relationship has improved so much since we started having weekly meetings. We're both on the same page for what we're doing that week, we plan our date for the week, and we're able to support each other in our goals because we actually know what the other person is working on. The fact that we have a safe place to bring up issues when we're not already upset about something and we're emotionally prepared to deal with is so helpful. It's a time when we're not tired or hungry, we're more capable of dealing with the issues at hand."*

# THE BOTTOM LINE

**Being intentional about counseling together will bless our marriage. Couple Council is a God-given way for us to strengthen and protect our relationship, become one, and grow together throughout our life.**

---

## Additional Resources

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2016/05/saturday-afternoon-session/family-councils?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/the-beginners-guide-to-family-councils?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/01/young-adults/counsel-together-of-family-councils-for-couples?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/02/young-adults/speak-listen-and-love?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2012/06/counseling-together-in-marriage?lang=eng>

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2003/06/family-councils-a-conversation-with-elder-and-sister-baldard?lang=eng>



## More ideas for areas of Couple Council:

### Celebrations

It's important to keep positive as you counsel. Find your own ways to honor the last week and efforts made, rejoice in the goodness going on, and express specific appreciation for each other.

- How will we include Celebrations?

### Relationship Dynamics

There are many dynamics that need continual refining in marriage--communication, sexuality, dating, helping each other feel loved and supported, etc. Couple council is an excellent place to talk about the hard stuff, things that may be impeding, holding us back from being as powerful as we could be. Be sure to include some kind of place for expressing and resolving concerns.

- How do we want to discuss our Relationship Dynamics?
- Are there some questions we want to regularly ask ourselves and/or each other?  
(how to be better spouses for each other, how to spiritually strengthen our relationship, what we would like to learn, traditions/rituals we would like to incorporate, if there are any unconfessed wrongs or unaddressed hurts, how is our dating, sexual relationship, equal partnership and oneness, etc?)
- How will we make space for addressing concerns?

### Personal Connection and Development

Couple Council is also a good time to be intentional about better knowing and encouraging one another personally. There is a special spirit that comes when you ask your spouse for help with your personal needs and development and be willing to be accountability partners for each other on personal goals.

- How do we want to take time for Personal Connection and Development?
- Are there some questions we want to regularly ask one another?  
(what has been personally joyful or challenging, what are current interest/dreams/learnings/needs, how can we help each other, what can we pray for each other, how can we reduce stresses for each other, etc.)
- How will we support each other in personal goals?

### Vision Alignment

Regularly look at your life and goals together--what is going great and what you might do better. As you consider your long-term goals, think about what you have on your "joy bucket list" and what you want for learning and growth, serving and ministering.

- How do we want to make sure we have Vision Alignment?
- Are there questions we want to consistently ask about specific shared goals and where we're at in those?



## Coordinating, Planning and Prioritizing

Couple Council is also an important time to unify our efforts by coordinating our calendars and prioritizing our plans together. This might include reviewing weekly schedules and our efforts in ministry and life missions (including parenting), school, employment, our financial stewardship, and our home management (including housework, house rules, preparedness, etc.)

- What is the best way for us to do Coordinating, Planning and Prioritizing?
- How do we want to be able to coordinate schedules, share calendar, review plans and priorities?
- How will we look at our ministry and life mission efforts, including extended family, church and community involvement?
- How will we discuss our children, what we each learn about them, their struggles, and how to collaborate in helping them?
- When will we coordinate our financial stewardship, review our financial standing and goals?
- How do we want to address home management (housework, house rules like media usage, emergency preparedness including disaster response skills, etc.)