



Marriage Counseling

A Conversation with Pat and Kristen Noonan

Kristen, tell me about how the two of you met.

We met at the hockey rink. Pat played hockey at the same place my brothers played. It was a small rink and the hockey community is a small, tight community, so you would cross paths with the same people a lot. I knew who he was. Pat was on my ex-boyfriend's hockey team. I ended up running into him at a party when we were 19 years old.

Pat, when did you ask Kristen out?

She invited me and some friends over to her house. Eventually, she and I just started hanging out more frequently. It never was a formal asking her out, we just knew we liked each other and spent more time together.

When did you decide to get married?

Kristen: Well, I got pregnant. Both of our parents were supportive and didn't insist we get married. They were concerned as we were only 21 years old. That is a tough way to start your life together. We both knew we wanted to get married anyway, now it was just a bit sooner. We got married on July 22, 1995, bought a condo in August and had a baby in December. We have been married 26 years.

What do you think are some challenges that couples face today?

Pat: finances are always a big challenge. People say they want to wait until they are financially stable to get married and have kids, but that rarely happens. You may be close to it, but when you have kids there are more and more expenses and couples don't always agree on things.

Kristen: I agree with money being an issue. I also think different priorities can cause problems. One person's set of priorities might be the fancy cars and big house and the other person's might be more family oriented. When our second child was born, we decided that I would be a stay at home mom which meant we no longer had my income.



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We could not afford vacations and other things our friends got to do, but that was the choice we made. We are fortunate that our priorities were the same, but we hit some rough patches.

Let's talk about that.

Kristen: When we bought our house, it was a gut job to make it what we wanted it to be. Pat worked all day and then went to work on the house. He lived at the house while I was at my parent's house with the two kids. We hardly saw each other and the stress really got to me. I was not even 30 years old and was having a midlife crisis. I started going out at night a lot with friends, not coming home until 2-3 o'clock in the morning. I was having fun. It continued even after we moved into the house. I couldn't wait for Pat to get home so I could leave. Then one day, Pat told me he made an appointment and we were going to see a counselor.

At first, I was against it because there was still that stigma back then. People do not need to know our business and we do not need someone else to tell us what is wrong with us.

Going to counseling was one of the best things we ever did for each other. When I finally told my friends about it and that Pat was the one who set it up and insisted that we go, everyone was surprised because most men won't do that; admit that something is wrong.

Going to counseling saved our marriage and helped put priorities back in check for me.

Pat, what was the turning point for you? When did you realize things were not going well in your marriage and that the two of you needed help?

There was not just one point that made it click. It was a growing feeling. At some point, you get frustrated, then you get aggravated, and then you hit the boiling point. When I hit the boiling point, I realized we had to do something. It was not just the going out, there were money concerns too but we could not sit down and talk if she wasn't home. Finally, I realized if we wanted to continue to be married, (which we did), then we had to talk with somebody. Counseling was the best thing we ever did for our marriage.

Tell me about those counseling sessions. Were they were challenging, at least in the beginning?

Kristen: Oh yeah. I did not want to go. I was very unkind about going. The counselor would meet with us as a couple and both of us separately. It was a very good way for us because sometimes when we would meet with the counselor as a couple, I would feel like they were ganging up on me. Looking back, that was not what was happening at all. It was challenging. She gave us homework.

After I finally accepted the process, I always felt lighter and ready for the next step when we left the sessions.

Pat: I thought they were great. The counselor did a fantastic job. She never said, "you're right or you're wrong," it was "you two need to do this together. Pat, you practice this over the next week and Kristen you practice this." We only saw the counselor for about six months but she helped us bring everything together and refine our relationship. I'll admit I was immature when we got married.

Talk about the homework.

Kristen: We had to schedule date nights.

Pat: When you have children, you have sports schedules, church and school schedules and the

counselor told us "you need to schedule YOUR time away from the kids." We did. We sat down every Sunday and looked at the calendar to find time for the two of us, like dinner, a movie or just time to talk, even if it was only a couple of hours.

What did you learn in those counseling sessions that is still present in your relationship today?

Pat: Take time for each other. Take time for yourself. Communicate with each other.

Kristen: Don't rotate your life around your kids. We learned to focus on each other and doing things together. We joined a bowling league with friends that met once a month. Little by little we started working on taking time for each other and talking! Talking is really important.

What advice would you give to couples who may be considering counseling?

Kristen: Are you in it for the long haul? Marriage is hard. You have to really work on your relationship. There is no shame in asking for help.

Pat: Do you love each other? Are you committed to a life together? Counseling can help you get to the next step.