

## **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

9. Marriage and the family are fundamental institutions within our society. Every year hundreds of thousands of people get married, intending to share their lives with one another. Weddings are celebrated as times of great joy and hope. The love that parents show to their children is the gift that makes society possible. Despite pressures of work, many parents make great efforts to spend as much time as they can with their children and, working closely with their schools, seek to educate them in what is most worthwhile and valuable in life.

10. However, changes in our society have had a significant effect on the institutions of marriage and the family. Relationship breakdown, divorce, and alternative partnerships are accepted by many as part and parcel of modern life. For instance, in 2000, while there were 305,000 marriages there were over 154,000 divorces (Office of National Statistics). This has had a devastating effect on the bringing up of children, as separation and divorce commonly leave children hurt and confused.

11. Witnessing so many marriages break down, some couples no longer see the value of going through a marriage ceremony and prefer simply to live together. Couples in this situation have begun to argue that the law should give them the same status as married couples. Parliament has sought to reflect this change in society by voting to amend the law on adoption so that an unmarried couple could adopt as a couple. However, it should be noted that, at present, the rate of relationship breakdown in cohabiting unmarried couples is significantly higher than is the case in married couples.

12. Threats to family stability can arise from various external factors, for example, poor housing, unemployment and low income. Violence and crime can make neighbourhoods hostile to family life. As a parent, it is hard to combat the power of television and magazines, the advertising that is directed at children, and the influence of their peer group. Much of children's media is creative and responsible, but many parents are concerned at some of the messages that come from these sources. It sometimes seems to be assumed that, to be normal, a teenager should be sexually active. Also troubling is the encouragement of fashion and self-consciousness about body-image even in young children.

## **QUESTIONS**

*Is Marriage becoming increasingly irrelevant to a vast swathe of people? Discuss*

*Are children adversely affected by the separation of their parents? Discuss*

*If children are brought up in a loving home does it matter whether the parents are of the same or opposite genders? Discuss*

*Does the group agree that children are being robbed of their innocence by inappropriate sex education? Discuss*