

Playbook: Your Guide to Life & Money

Tying the Knot: To Half and to Whole

What Is Covered in This Chapter:

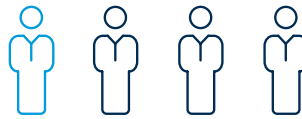
- Questions to ask your future partner before making it official
- Real talk on all things related to love and finances: prenups, savings, and spending habits
- Budgeting for bling, weddings, and honeymoons
- Navigating newlywed expectations and managing joint finances

From planning the big day to planning the rest of your lives, tying the financial knot involves adjustments and compromise. For richer or poorer—with an emphasis on the richer part, preferably. By understanding expectations, setting common goals, and mapping out life as a couple, there are lots of ways you can build a healthy financial foundation for the future, together.



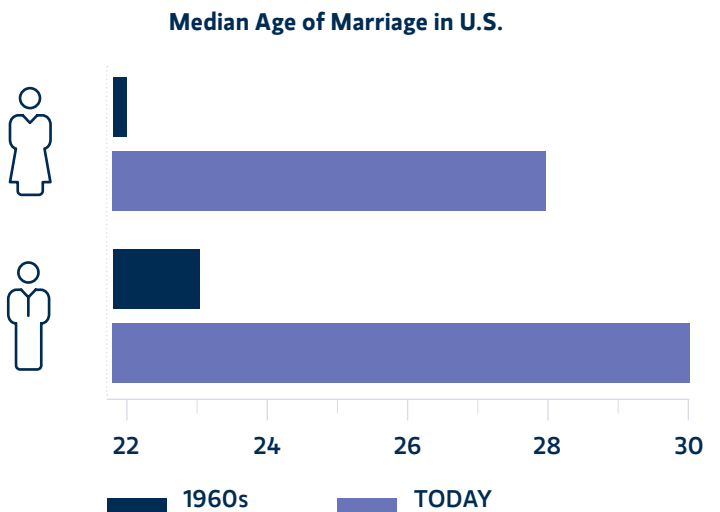
Modern Love

People are waiting longer than ever before to get married—with a median age of 28 for women and 30 for men compared to 20 and 23 in the 1960s.¹



What's more, research in 2021 found that a quarter of 40-year-olds in the U.S. had never been married—up from 20% in 2010.

While findings suggest many of those adults will still likely get married at some point, the numbers signal a growing trend of more people leading more independent lives for longer.²



THEN NOW

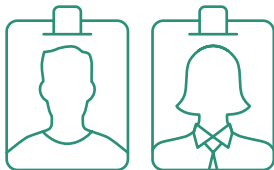
The Evolution of Marriage Stereotypes

The traditional role of marriage is evolving along with gender roles, career expectations, and modern-day families.

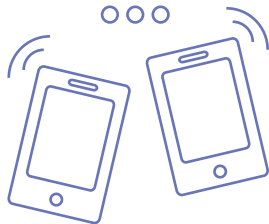
♥ **BREADWINNER
VS. HOMEMAKER
MODEL**



♥ **GENDER ROLE
TRANSITION**



♥ **MODERN DAY
PARTNERSHIP**



Catchphrase	"Honey I'm home!"	Pantsuits for all!	What's your policy on paternity leave?
Career Roles	He makes the bacon, she cooks it; female careers limited to secretarial jobs	Women are also breadwinners, until they have a bun in the oven	Sharing responsibilities when it comes to income, housework, and caregiving
Weeknight Meals	Roast dinner with homemade apple pie for dessert	A quick fix using whatever is available (or defrostable) to make a pasta salad or quiche	Something fresh and local picked up on way home, ordered online, or delivered by subscription box
Happy Hour Expectations	Come home to a clean house, happy wife, and stiff drink	Date night and a babysitter	"Unplug" from all devices for quality family time

The number one rule? Be honest with each other.

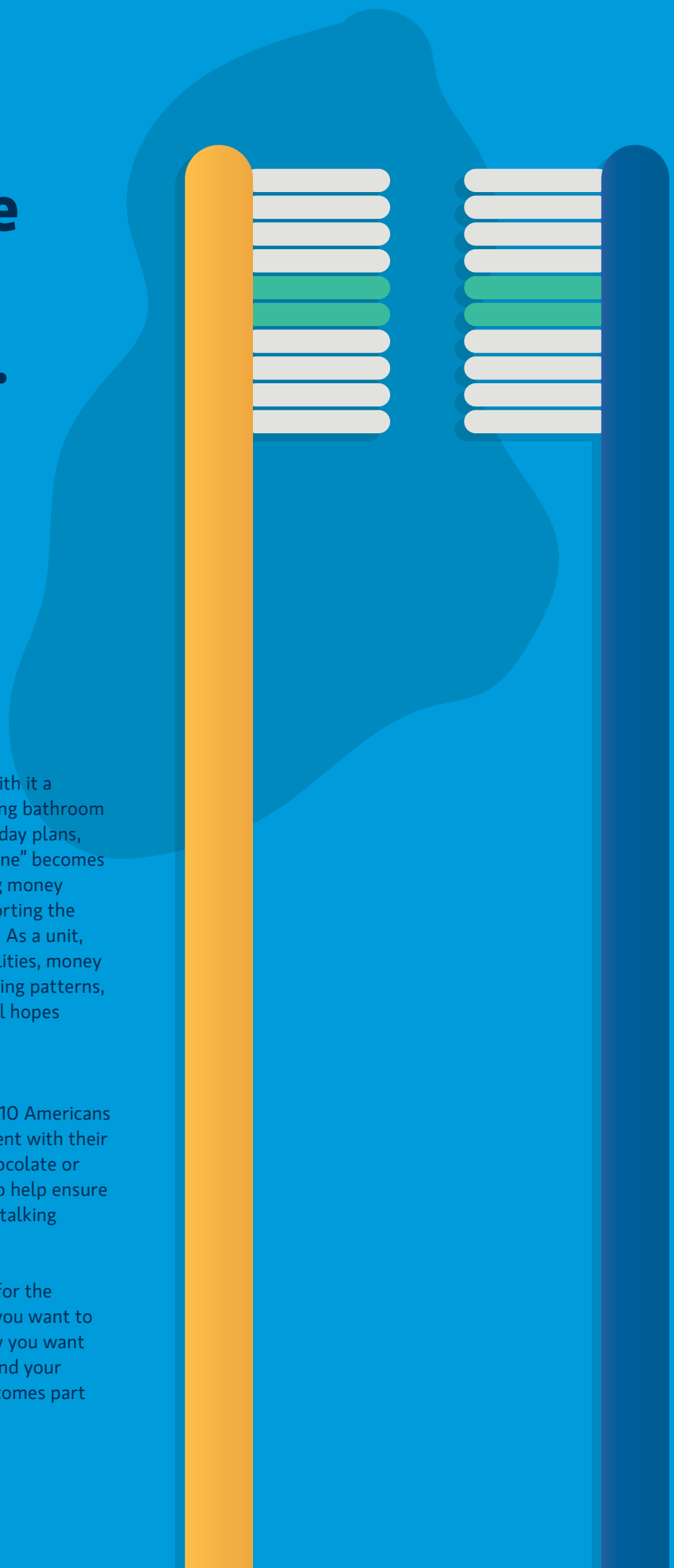
When two become one

Creating a life together is magical, but it also brings with it a whole new meaning to the word “compromise:” morning bathroom time, the “good side” of the bed, the TV remote, Saturday plans, work-from-home schedules, holiday family visits—“mine” becomes “ours” (and occasionally even “yours”). To avoid letting money become a sensitive issue rather than a means to supporting the life you treasure together, lay it all out from the start. As a unit, you now share everything, including family responsibilities, money values, credit histories, budget restrictions, and spending patterns, so don't be shy when it comes to sharing your financial hopes and fears.

Setting Expectations

The number one rule? Be honest with each other. 7 in 10 Americans married or living with a partner have had a disagreement with their companion about finances in the past year.³ Forget chocolate or couples therapy—one of the best things you can do to help ensure the success of your relationship is to get comfortable talking about money.

Take time to respectfully listen to each other's vision for the future—where you want to live, what type of career you want to pursue, how many children you want to have, and how you want to retire. Routinely talk about lifestyle expectations and your financial well-being as a couple or family so that it becomes part of your routine, rather than a hot topic.





12 Questions to Ask a Future Partner Before Committing

1. What are your life goals and dreams?
2. What are some of your earliest money memories (the good and the bad), and how did your family talk about money growing up?
3. What are some of your biggest financial concerns about the next 5–10 years? What about the next 20–25 years?
4. Do you have any outstanding debt or obligations I should know about, and if so, do you have a plan in place to address them?
5. If you were to receive a \$1,000 tax refund tomorrow, how would you spend it and why?
6. What are your professional goals? How do you envision balancing career and family?
7. What are your expectations for each other's career responsibilities?
8. What does your dream retirement look like? Do you even want to retire?
9. Do you want to live in the city, the suburbs, or a more rural area?
10. If you plan on having children, how do you envision sharing parenting responsibilities and what values do you want to pass on when it comes to money?
11. How do you envision dividing household expenses and who is going to be responsible for financial chores such as paying bills, tracking expenses, and managing the budget?
12. If one of us were offered a career opportunity in another city or country, how would we handle it?



WINNING PLAYS for Couples:

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Start by asking your partner about any debt, secondary income sources, expected inheritance, or properties you should know about. While you probably want to avoid asking your partner about their 401(k) during your first date, communicating early and often will help you both become more comfortable with the topic and avoid unpleasant surprises in the future.

Schedule monthly or quarterly money dates.

Timing is everything when it comes to discussing the “M-word” (a.k.a. Money) and it helps to plan ahead so no one is blindsided. Get in the habit of scheduling regular meetings to discuss your finances and address any concerns or questions that may come up throughout the year. Consider creating an official calendar invite and planning these conversations around something fun like a movie night or dinner date.

Get to know your partner's money personality.

Everyone approaches his or her finances differently. Some people are savers, others are spenders, and some people prefer to avoid the topic altogether. Once you know your partner's money personality, try and play to his or her strengths. If you are the saver, you might want to manage your joint retirement savings, while your partner focuses on paying the monthly utility bill.

Establish common money goals.

Even if you and your partner still have separate accounts, it's important to be working toward common goals. Once you know what these goals are, establish how much you are each going to contribute toward your goal every month and stick to it. An equal amount or equal percentage of income is often the easiest way to do this.

Agree on an individual spending limit.

This is especially relevant if your finances are merged. To avoid the negative connotation of having to “ask for permission” to spend money from a joint account, agree that any purchases above a set limit must be discussed and agreed upon together.

Get filing.

Make sure to organize all financial documentation, including both individual and joint paperwork, in a central place. Create a filing system for all aspects of your financial status as a couple (such as account statements, tax returns, contracts, and bills), so that you can easily refer back to your financial history when it comes to important applications or decisions in the future.

Talking about finances doesn't have to be scary. It is important to remember that you and your partner are on this journey together. Setting goals and talking about money early on can help you reach your shared goals.

Prenups: Ultimate Mood Killer or Secret to Marital Bliss?

A prenup or “prenuptial agreement” is a legal agreement between two parties that outlines exactly which assets belong to whom and what happens to these assets and any assets that the couple might accumulate together in the event the marriage ends.

Prenups get a bad rap. There’s a stigma that prenups are only for the ultra-wealthy and suggest a lack of commitment or confidence in the longevity of a relationship. This reputation may be fueled by the tabloids, but more and more non-celebrity couples are signing this document before saying “I do.”

In fact, there are a lot of reasons to believe that a prenup can increase your chance of achieving a happily ever after. It forces you and your partner to discuss your finances and address how you will handle certain stressful scenarios together in the future. This helps ensure that you are both entering the marriage with eyes wide open. Divorce is messy and emotional enough—by having the tough conversations up front, you reduce the likelihood that you find yourself in a painful, drawn-out legal battle if things go south.

Skiping the Big Day Altogether?

If you and your partner have decided to skip the marriage license altogether, consider drafting a domestic partnership agreement or a cohabitation agreement instead. This document is similar to a prenup and includes provisions about how expenses will be shared as well as how common assets will be split in the event the relationship should end. Talk to your Financial Advisor about seeking advice for decisions related to joint financial arrangements such as purchasing a home together or alternative money management strategies such as Family Limited Partnerships.

SIGN
HERE

PRENU

×



WINNING PLAYS for Prenups:

Hire separate attorneys.

This not only avoids any potential conflict of interest between you and your fiancée, but it also increases the chances that your prenup will be enforceable in court.

Be specific.

Where possible, define terms such as marital property vs. separate property to avoid any uncertainty or confusion in the future.

Be fair.

For a prenup to be enforceable in court, it cannot be too one-sided.

Start the process early.

Do not wait until the week before the wedding to finalize your prenup. By that time you will have more than enough to worry about with seating charts and needy relatives.

Avoid any mention of child support or custody.

Prenups are solely focused on establishing provisions related to you and your partner.

Pick an appropriate venue to have the discussion.

In case you were wondering, prenups do not make for appropriate pillow talk.

Research state-specific regulations.

Some states, such as California, require that a prenup be signed at least seven days after it has been presented.

Reflect important terms in your estate plan.

A prenup is just one of the many legal documents that you and your partner will be drafting together. Avoid potential issues by making sure these agreements don't contradict one another.

Breaking Down the Big Day

Bling 101

With so many options for engagement rings and wedding bands, it can be easy to get lost in all the sparkle. Here is an overview to help ensure you are making an educated purchase using the 4C's of diamonds:

Clarity	This refers to the flaws or “inclusions” in the diamond. Although the vast majority of these flaws cannot be seen by the naked eye, when it comes to price, less equals more.
Color	Ranging from D to Z, diamonds vary in the degree of color tint (slight yellow) as you move further down the alphabet. For example, D, E and F diamonds are considered colorless and therefore are more expensive. G, H, and I diamonds have a slight hint of yellow (considered ‘near colorless’). Although the color is unnoticeable to the untrained eye once mounted, it can have a significant impact on pricing.
Cut	The shape of the diamond (including factors like symmetry and precision). Common cuts include brilliant (round), emerald (rectangular), and princess (square).
Carat	The weight of a diamond ranges from a fraction of a carat to multiple carats. A carat equals 200 milligrams and can be measured with two decimal points (e.g., 1.08) for specific detail. As the carat weight increases, so does the cost.

TIP: Make sure to get a certificate upon purchase to help ensure you are not being taken advantage of and have all the documentation for insurance purposes.

Wedding Budgets

Weddings come to life in all different sizes and formats from intimate microweddings to more traditional wedding celebrations. Here are some ways you can make your budget work for the wedding you envision.

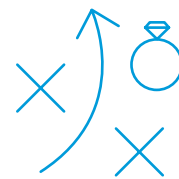
GET REAL:

Whether you have financial support from either or both families, or are paying for the wedding as a couple, have an honest dialogue about financial expectations before the planning begins. If either of your families decides to contribute, make sure everyone has an understanding of how that will work and what it will entail.

GET TO A NUMBER:

Start researching the costs of different wedding vendors to avoid being caught off guard by just how expensive a wedding can be. Decide on a ballpark figure for the total cost that you and your partner (and any contributing family members) feel

comfortable with and work backward from there. Your number should reflect what you could comfortably afford, rather than what you would like to spend.

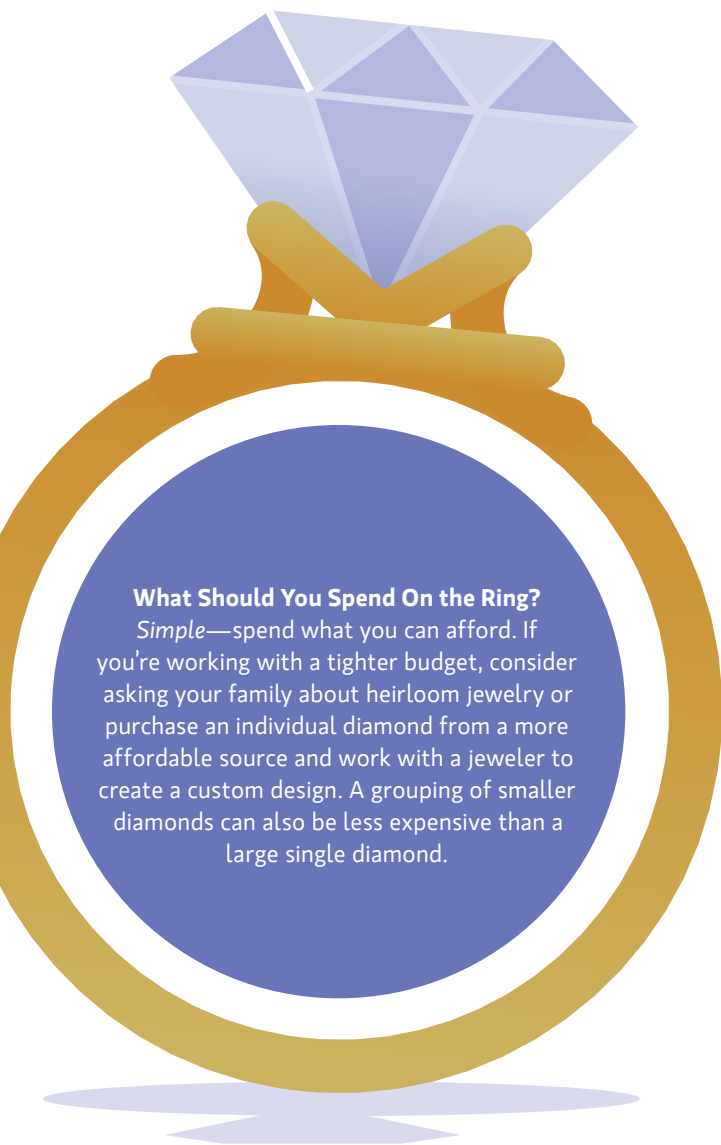


ESTABLISH PRIORITIES:

Determine what elements of the wedding are most important to you as a couple so that you are prepared to make the necessary trade-offs. If you have your heart set on a particular vendor (e.g., a photographer or caterer), be sure to reach out for an estimate and work that into your budget. Be flexible as venues adjust to new capacity rules and safety protocols.

BE PROACTIVE WHEN IT COMES TO FAMILY:

If there are certain aspects of the celebration that are particularly important to either family, discuss these upfront to avoid unexpected or uncomfortable “asks” leading up to the big day. These last-minute changes could also have a huge impact on your budget and logistics.



What Should You Spend On the Ring?

Simple—spend what you can afford. If you're working with a tighter budget, consider asking your family about heirloom jewelry or purchase an individual diamond from a more affordable source and work with a jeweler to create a custom design. A grouping of smaller diamonds can also be less expensive than a large single diamond.



HONEYMOON HACKS

- Use credit card points or frequent flyer miles to book or upgrade travel.
- Consider a honeymoon registry, in which guests can choose to give alternative wedding gifts, including contributing to your travel fund or paying for specific activities such as a snorkeling excursion.
- Shake up the traditional honeymoon with a staycation or local mini-moon. Use the extra funds and put it into your first home instead.
- Explore all-inclusive options to manage costs upfront and avoid the “why not get a third bottle of champagne, it’s our honeymoon!” rationale that could put a damper on the trip once you receive the bill.
- Check out discount sites such as Mr. & Mrs. Smith that can give you access to perks such as room upgrades, if available.
- Drop the honeymooner hint to the hotel or airline staff. You never know when someone will feel extra generous and decide to upgrade your reservation on the house.

Wedding Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts of Being the Perfect Guest



DO return your RSVP as soon as possible and answer all the questions. The last thing the couple wants to worry about is whether you would prefer steak or salmon.

DO check out the couple's registry, if they have one. For close friends, you may consider opting for a more personal gift, but a registry exists for a reason. Stick to the couple's wish list to make sure your gift of choice is something they really want.

DO send a gift, even if you cannot attend. Technically, you have up to a year after the wedding to do so, but if you wait, you might risk forgetting to send a gift altogether.

DO congratulate the family. Remember, this day has probably involved extensive planning, so sharing your gratitude and best wishes can mean a lot to the couple's nearest and dearest.



DON'T wear white. You have an entire rainbow of other color options to choose from.

DON'T ask for a plus-one if it has not been offered. Respect the couple's wishes for their special day, and know that if they want to extend the invitation at a nearer date, they will do so.

DON'T miss the magic because you're glued to your screen. You can choose the perfect Instagram filter after they say "I do." Also, be courteous about flash photography (or photography in general) as the couple may not want guests taking photos during the ceremony.

DON'T leave before the cake is cut. You'll miss out on a special celebratory moment, and come on, who doesn't have a little space left for dessert?!

The Financial Perks for Newlyweds

As newlyweds, there are various tax, legal, and saving opportunities that you may be able to take advantage of.

1



FILING TAXES JOINTLY:

If one spouse is making significantly more than the other, you may qualify for a lower marginal income tax bracket when filing jointly as opposed to the higher-earner's bracket if married filing separately.

2



HEALTH INSURANCE:

When it comes to health insurance, it can be more economical to add an extra person to a policy than to pay for separate health insurance plans. This is particularly useful if one spouse is self-employed.

3



GIFTING MONEY:

As U.S. citizens, you can make federal tax-free gifts of any amount to your U.S. citizen spouse rather than using any portion of your lifetime gift tax exemption or paying federal gift tax in the event one of you is supporting the other financially.

4



RETIREMENT SAVINGS:

You can contribute to a spousal IRA. If one of you is not working, the working spouse can generally contribute to the non-working spouse's IRA.

Joint Accounts and Financial Independence

Should you combine your bank accounts or keep finances separate?
Here are the pros and cons of both scenarios:

JOINT ACCOUNTS		vs	SEPARATE ACCOUNTS	
Pros	Cons		Pros	Cons
+ Can simplify managing family budgets and paying for shared expenses like rent or groceries.	- Can cause tension if one spouse has significantly different spending habits or varying levels of income.		+ Can give couples a sense of financial independence and autonomy.	- Tracking spending patterns, savings goals, and budget benchmarks can be more complicated when working across multiple bank accounts.
+ Can help you establish a healthy financial dialogue and avoid money secrets by encouraging transparency.	- Reduces privacy and discretionary spending.		+ May encourage more budgeting discipline with access to a smaller pool of funds.	- The responsibility of paying joint expenses and bills falls on one spouse.
+ Spouses have immediate access to funds in the event of an emergency.	- Spouses are tied to each other's credit history and/or debt.			- Harder to cover larger joint expenses or float the cost of large purchases if one partner's income is timed differently.

What's in a Name?: How to Change Your Name

- 1

Step 1: Change your social security card
Fill out the Name Change Application on the Social Security website and gather supporting documentation including your marriage certificate, birth certificate, U.S. driver's license, and U.S. passport. Submit your application and supporting documentation either in-person (at a local social security office) or by mail. You should receive your new card 10 days after your application is processed.
- 2

Step 2: Change your driver's license
Bring your new social security card along with multiple forms of identification such as your current driver's license and certified marriage license to the DMV.

- 3

Step 3: Change your bank account information
Bring your updated driver's license as well as your marriage license to a branch office of your bank. Upon changing your name on the account, don't forget to request new checks, debit cards, and credit cards if required.
- 4

Step 4: Update everything else
After changing your name on both your social security card and driver's license, you should be able to switch to your married name on everything else, including:
 - Employee documentation/payroll
 - Utilities
 - Post Office records
 - Leases or mortgages
 - Insurance policies (auto, home, life)
 - Medical records
 - Voter registration
 - Financial accounts
 - Passport

Questions to Ask Your Financial Advisor

- Can we review any investment accounts belonging to either partner to cover risk tolerance and investment objectives?
- Should I consider consolidating accounts, or if opening a joint account, how can I determine an investment style that meets our joint objectives?
- Should I rebalance my portfolio as I start married life?
- How can I begin preparing for future marital expenses such as family planning or buying a home?
- If either partner has outstanding debt, what should I focus on paying off as soon as possible?

Must Reads

Things I Wish I'd Known Before I Got Married

AUTHOR: GARY CHAPMAN

This book shares the wisdom of 50 leading investors in a seven-step blueprint for achieving financial success.

The Knot Book of Wedding Lists

AUTHOR: CARLEY RONEY

Filled with useful checklists, this book can help manage wedding planning details from start to finish.

For Better

AUTHOR: TARA PARKER-POPE

An exploration of marriage today from a popular *New York Times* columnist who shares statistics and research findings on what contributes to a successful marriage.

Smart Couples Finish Rich

AUTHOR: DAVID BACH

This step-by-step guide to financial planning for couples provides simple money management tools.

It's Not You, It's the Dishes

AUTHORS: PAULA SZUCHMAN AND JENNY ANDERSON

This entertaining book explores the practice of building a happy marriage from a business perspective.

CITATIONS:

[1] US Census Bureau. (2020).

[2] [Pew Research Center](#). "A record-high share of 40-year-olds in the U.S. have never been married." (2023)

[3] The Harris Poll, on behalf of the AICPA. (2021).

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