

**Catholic Social Service, Strengthening  
Refugee Families and Marriages**

**Refugee Marriage Education  
Program**

(RMEP)

Has been adapted from the  
Prevention and Relationship  
Enhancement Program

(PREP Program)

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## Section 1 Program

1. RMEP is an educational program and not counseling
  - a. Video will present core concepts.
  - b. Skills will be presented for you to practice in session and for homework.
  - c. The program does not ask couples/individuals to share a lot of personal negative information with others in the group.
  
2. **Key concepts will be covered, such as:**
  - a. Communication and conflict management
  - b. Problem solving
  - c. Ground rules for protecting your relationship
  - d. Expectations and what to do about them
  - e. Commitment
  - f. Core beliefs systems
  - g. Constraints, cultural identity
  - h. Dealing with power, coping with control
  - i. Social support

## **Section 2: Relationships and Marriage**

### **a) What is a relationship?**

This means Relate with your mate. Build a friendship. *Maintain a lasting relation by showing respect, caring, social support, love and sharing.*

### **b) What is Marriage?**

*There is no marriage without relationship.*

RELATIONSHIP is sine-qua-non condition or key prior, during and after marriage.

Building an effective marriage requires a lot of preparation and commitment. *Commitment meaning to plan to stay together, dedication to union and willing to share everything that is part of domestic partners' life.*

Before you and your spouse begin your journey together, first know where you are going.

Your shared destination is a combination of both your personal and shared values

*Making sure that you understand your mutual values, share the same world view, means that you are on the same road.*

Marriage involves a lot of decisions from both you and your spouse. You are both *bilingual* since you come from two different backgrounds. *Trough mutual respect, love, trust, honesty, friendship, social support, forgiveness you will discuss and manage your differences with ease.*

## b.1 Your Values

When you marry you will be sharing your own values and the values of your intended spouse. *Your values and beliefs need to be compatible.* Share openly and honestly about what you consider to be personal, important and sacred in your life with your partner.

If there are issues and differences or concerns, *it is crucial that your spouse know them prior to making a marriage commitment.*

The foundation of an harmonious, lasting marriage will be built upon effective communication of these values

## b.2 Your Team

Marriage is *a team effort.* Team is defined as “a group of persons pulling together”. Pulling together and sharing the same goals are crucial to an effective team. Team members usually have *different roles and different task to perform, but they share the commitment to the team and success of the team.*

Sharing decisions that affect team members is very important.

Talking, listening and valuing your partner’s ideas and contributions will make your marriage team strong and healthy.

Try to *avoid negative communication,* it destroys relationship.

## **Section 3**

### **Factors associated with Marital Distress**

#### **A. Static Factors are usually harder to change**

- Some personality factors
- Religious dissimilarity
- Young age at marriage
- Different background
- Economic status

#### **B. Dynamic Factors are good targets**

##### **For changes and improvements.**

- Communication ability
- Conflict management
- Physical aggression
- Commitment and motivation

## **Section 4**

### **Core Assumptions of the Refugee Marriage Education Program (RMEP)**

- The key is to prevent serious problems from developing in the first place.
- By knowing key RISK factors for marital problems, you will know more about what makes successful marriages.
- How you communicate and handle conflict is crucial for how your marriage will go.
- All couples will have problems. It is how you handle them that count most. We want you to improve your talking without fighting, even in the most difficult topics.
- Many factors raise the tendency to conflicts. Some are hard, even seem impossible, to change.
- Now that you are aware of the conflict and communication skills, continue to build and protect your great things in your marriage such as:
  - Role of spirituality (explore with participants, see leader manual)
  - Role of culture, commitment (discuss with participants, refer to teacher's manual)
  - Social support and friendship ( talk about socialization and importance of relationships in most of the cultures
  - Constraints (explore situations that remind partners the role of parents and therefore keep them together)

- It is important to know the risk factors before you enhance your relationship.

## Section 5

# Danger Signs That Unravel A Marriage And Erode All The Good Feelings Between Two People.

(Work hard to keep these patterns away.)

- **Escalation:** Occurs why partners respond back and forth negatively to each other.
  - (verbal, emotional and content)
- **Invalidation:** partner puts down the thoughts, feelings or character of the other.
- **Negative interpretations:** When one partner consistently believes that motives of the other are more negative than is really the case.
- **Withdrawal:** partner shows an unwillingness to get into or stay with important discussions.
  - (one is in the pursuer role and one is in the avoider role around conflictual issues.)

**Note:** Negative interactions characterized by the DANGER SIGNS and related patterns kill a marriage over time.

Researchers estimate that a couple must maintain five up to twenty positive for every negative to maintain a happy marriage (Gottman, 1993; Markman, 1993).

## **Section 6**

# **Effective Communication**

- This is a technique teaching how to talk without fighting. They also call it the FLOOR, the Speaker and Listener Technique.
- The rules for using the FLOOR:

## **Speaker Listener Technique**

### *Rules for the Speaker*

- Speak for yourself, don't mind read!
- Keep statements brief. Don't go on and on.
- Stop to let the listener paraphrase.

### *Rules for the Listener*

- Paraphrase what you hear.
- Focus on the speaker's message. Don't rebut.

### *Rules for Both*

- The speaker has the floor.
- Speaker keeps the floor while the listener paraphrases.
- Share the floor.

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### Agree on TIME-OUT

- Decide together to drop the issue for the time being.
- The person who calls TIME-OUT will introduce TIME-IN whenever it is necessary.
- Focus on understanding, not agreement.
- Practice the FLOOR

- Practice will enhance your communication skills even when you are not using the full structure.

## **Section 7**

### **Negative Communication**

- It is a combination of negative patterns and unexpressed thoughts which may lead to BLAMING each other for the problem.

#### **A. Filters**

It is important to get your partner's attention when you have something important to say and have heard.

##### Types of **filters**

- Destructions
- Functional states or strong feelings.

It is difficult to talk and listen when feeling sad, angry or in a bad mood.

- Beliefs and expectations

Negative interpretations are good examples of how somebody may believe that raising voice or keeping silent means your partner does not care.

##### ➤ Self Protection

- When you are wrong, please admit it!
- Have the humility to NOT ARGUE about who's memory is better.
- Recognize that all kinds of filters become barriers to openness and healthy relationship.

## **Section 7 cont...**

### **B. Issues and Events**

- These are the day to day events of life that couples and family members argue about the most. Examples: money, in-laws, parenting, jobs, household tasks, etc.
- Partners start picking at each other to find who does what.
- Gender roles and gender rules become an issue.
- Deal with issues as issues, not as pockets of anger and frustration
- Find appropriate times to discuss the issues and protect that time.

### **C. Hidden Issues**

- Control and power
  - Who is in charge?
  - In some cultures, it is OK to consult the head of household before the decision.
- Commitment
  - Are you going to stay with me? (Was the marriage your own choice?)
- Recognition
  - Do you feel valued by your partner?
  - In some cultures, women are deprived from certain jobs because they are hard and therefore, should be the responsibility of men (construction, machinery, maintenance)

In order to solve problems, partners should know what kind

of expectations they have and how they should be met.

## Section 8

### Problem Solving

#### A. Expectations

- Expectations: Defined as beliefs about the way things will be or should be.
  - Including: behaviors, roles, life and death, relationships and so forth.
  - Find where expectations come from
  - Know that expectations that are not met lead to feelings of sadness, disappointment, frustration and anger.
  
- Three key points to better manage expectations
  - Be AWARE of what you expect.
  - Be REASONABLE in what you expect.
  - Be OPEN about what you expect.

#### B. Better Way to Raise Concerns

- Show Respect
  - Research how people tend to be least polite with those they know best.
  - State your point with clarity.
  
- Be Specific

***The technique of the XYZ statement puts emphasis on what you see and what you feel, not on blame toward the partner.***

## **Section 8 (continued)**

Using XYZ for

### **Constructive Conversation**

**A. When you do X (specific behavior)**

**B. In SITUATION Y (specific situation)**

**C. I FEEL Z (owning feelings, be respectful and be specific)**

### **C. Discuss problems before trying to solve them**

- **Problem discussion**
  - Use the FLOOR technique
  - Good discussion should leave both feeling heard and validated even when you disagree
  - Work on the problem as a TEAM
  
- **Problem Solution**
  - Agenda Setting
  - Brainstorming
  - Agreement and Compromise
  - Follow-up

## **Section 9**

### **Core Belief Systems and Cultural Issues**

- They can be POSITIVE or NEGATIVE.
- Core beliefs, cultural issues, spiritual orientation can have profound effects on a marriage.

#### **Spiritual Orientation**

- ◆ Research shows results with religious involvement:
  - More stable marriages (Stanley & Markman, 1997; Call & Heaton, 1997.)
  - A bit higher level of dedication (Stanley, 1986; Stanley & Markman, 1997)
  - Tend to have very satisfying and frequent sex (Tavris & Sadd, The Redbook report on female sexuality, 1975; Michael, et al., Sex in America survey, 1994)
  
- ◆ Intermarriage between religious groups generally leads to greater chance of divorce (Call & Heaton, 1997).

#### **Why?**

- Clashes in expectations and viewpoints based on religious differences can lead to great conflicts if not handled skillfully.
  - People tend to become more religious as they age or as they have kids.
- 
- ◆ Research suggests that significant gains in marriage quality come when partners engage in joint religious activities together.

## **Section 9 (continued)**

### **Cultural Issues**

- ◆ Having a shared world view probably makes marriage easier.
  - World view is defined as a whole complex of beliefs and ideas about the universe, the world, right and wrong, and the purpose of life, etc., that guides one's sense of what life is all about (or not about).
  
- ◆ Your world view affects:
  - Religious practices
  - Child rearing practices (It takes a village to raise a child).
  - Relationship expectations

Note: Having the same world view enhances the sense of:

- Couple identity and shared goals
  - It leads to greater harmony in expectations and role definitions
    - (For example, in some cultures, men do not change diapers for babies or do not go down the valley to search for water.)
- 
- ◆ All couples need:
    - Social Support
    - Core Values that benefit a Marriage.

## Section 10

### **Social Support, Cultural Identity and Constraints**

#### A. **Social Support**

- ◆ It is typically strong in religious and social cultural settings.
- ◆ Many studies have shown that isolated people are more vulnerable to mental health issues, physical disease and economic problems when they lack social support.
- ◆ Partners are encouraged to find their own support system.
  - Some cultures believe a lot in socialization, enjoy having friends, and extended families involved in their daily life.

#### B. **Core Values**

- ◆ These values should be promoted in every marriage.
  - Most cultures promote:
    - Commitment and dedication
    - Respect
    - Friendship
    - Forgiveness

#### C. **Cultural Identity**

- ◆ Couple identity or “We-ness.”
  - The best relationships have a sense of a team working together.
    - (Some cultures include even not relatives to be part of the decision-makers: child is OK to receive disciplinary actions from a teacher)

or an elder in a village ...)

## **Section 10**

### **Social Support, Cultural Identity and Constraints**

#### **Continued**

#### **D. Constraints**

- ◆ Dedicated couples/partners show two faces of commitment:
  - Personal dedication
  - Constraint commitment
  
- ◆ Dedication is strongly associated with relationship quality and happiness.
  - It helps a marriage be fulfilling.
  - Enhances the “The Long Term View” of your relationship.
  
  - **Note:** A powerful way to demonstrate your dedication is to make sure you deal constructively with issues when discussing with your partner.
  
- ◆ Constraint has a lot to do with the quality of your alternatives.
  - Constraint can be a very positive force, lending stability to a marriage.
  - Constraints are really evidence of past dedication.
  - Constraints are:
    - Social pressure
    - Financial pressures
    - Children
    - Termination procedure
    - Moral factors
    - Concern for partner’s welfare

## **Section 11**

### **Conclusion**

YOU CAN'T "HAVE IT ALL,"  
but YOU CAN  
chose to  
**CHERISH** and **NURTURE**  
what **YOU** WANT MOST.

Strengthening fun and friendship in your  
relationship!

***JUST DO IT***  
***and***  
***YOU CAN DO IT.***

