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Love & Marriage- A Proactive Approach to Pre-Marital Education & Marriage Preparation
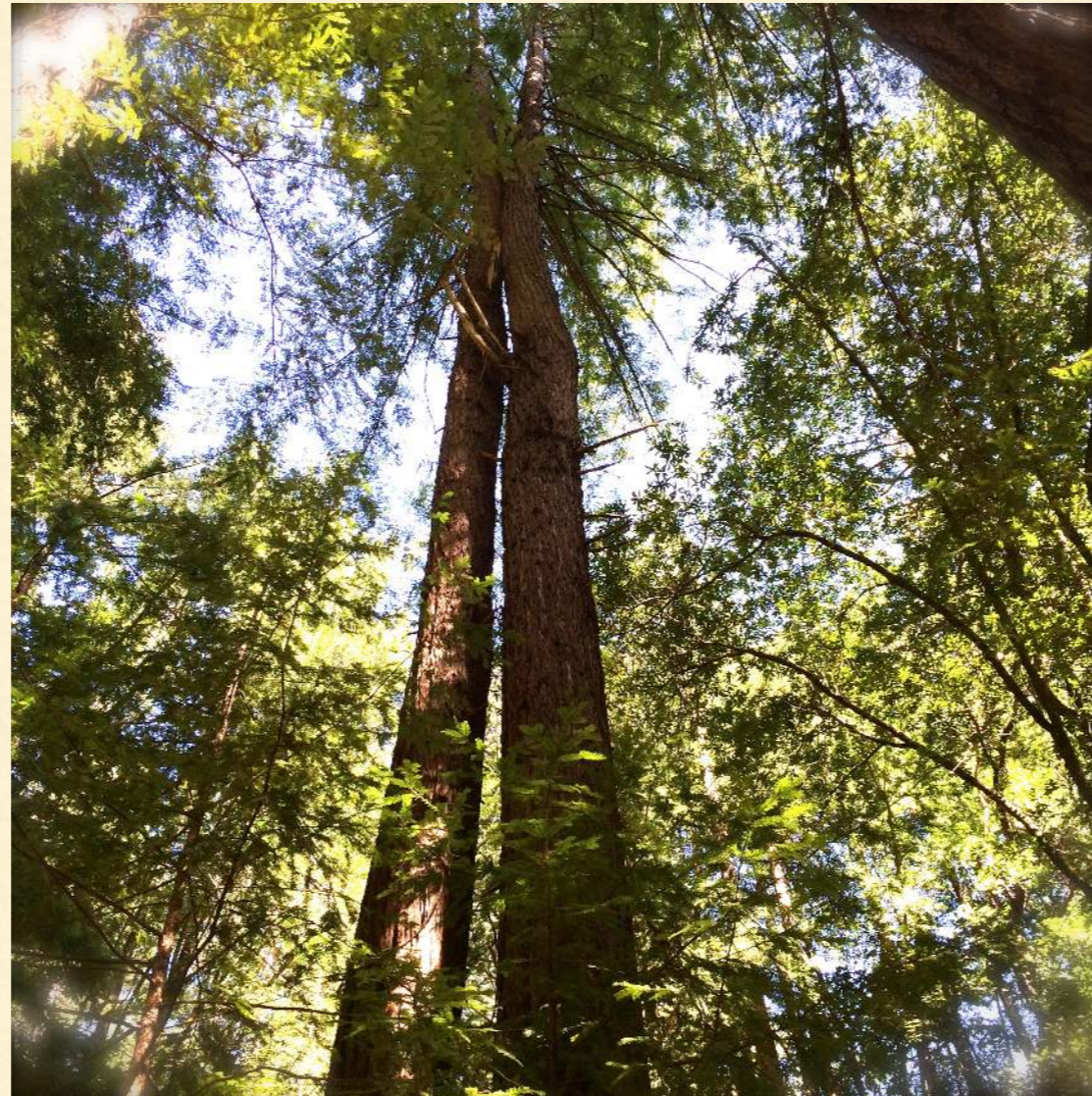
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LOVE & MARRIAGE

**A Proactive Approach
to
Pre-Marital Education & Marriage Preparation**

Program Designed & Facilitated by

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IS DIVORCE A PROBLEM?

Divorce Affects Spouses

Research indicates that **"marital dissolution"** is linked to **multiple negative physical and mental health consequences** for spouses, including:

"increased risk of psychopathology; increased rates of automobile accidents,...physical illness, suicide, violence,...decreased longevity, ...and increased mortality from diseases"
(Gottman, 1999, p.3).

Divorce Affects Children

Research indicates that children of divorcing or divorced parents, "compared to children with continuously married biological parents," experience greater "likelihood of dropping out of high school" as well as greater psychological, cognitive, or interpersonal challenges (Kim, 2011, p.487).

Divorce Affects Adult Children

According to research, young adults with divorced parents often experience greater pessimism about marriage, which, in turn, often contributes to weaker relationship commitment and quality
(Cui and Fincham, 2010).

Research also indicates that adult women with divorced parents, more so than men with divorced parents, tend to be less confident in committing to a future marriage and more cautious in selecting a marital partner, perhaps aware that "women generally suffer more negative consequences from divorce than do men, especially economically (Hetherington, 2003)" (Whitton, 2008, p. 792).

THE PREVALENCE OF MARITAL DIVORCE

Statistics indicate that 50-67% of first-time marriages in the U.S. will end in divorce over the course of a 40-year period

(Gottman, 1999).

Second-time marriages are just as likely, and perhaps 10% more likely, than first-time marriages to end in divorce

(Gottman, 1999).

THE EFFECTS OF:

HAPPY
VS.
UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

BENEFITS OF HAPPY MARRIAGES

Emotional Health

In a good marriage, spouses experience greater accountability and "positive supports such as a shared emotional life, companionship, and practical assistance," thus decreasing their experience of "loneliness and social isolation… anxiety and depression," and involvement in "antisocial behaviors" (Horn et al., 2013, p. 35).

Physical Health

In general, research shows that "people who are happily married, live longer, healthier lives than either divorced people or those who are unhappily married" (Gottman, 2015, p.6).

IS MARITAL CONFLICT A PROBLEM?

According to research by renowned relationship expert,
John M. Gottman, Ph.D. :

"Even happily married couples can have screaming matches — loud arguments don't necessarily harm a marriage"
(Gottman, 2015, p.14).

It is not so important whether a couple has conflict or not,
but rather, *how* the conflict is handled
and whether both spouses are *happy* in the marriage (Gottman, 2015).

CONSEQUENCES OF UNHAPPY, HIGHLY-CONFLICTED MARRIAGES

For Spouses

Even without divorcing, "in an unhappy marriage people experience **chronic, diffuse physiological arousal**," which can contribute to increased occurrence of "any number of **physical ailments**, including high blood pressure and heart disease, and … **psychological troubles** … anxiety, depression, substance abuse, psychosis, violence, and suicide"
(Gottman, 2015, p. 6).

CONSEQUENCES OF UNHAPPY, HIGHLY-CONFLICTED MARRIAGES

For Children

Children raised in homes with hostile, highly-conflicted marriages experience more **physiological stress, aggressive and maladaptive behaviors, emotional disturbance, and difficulties in school** than their peers raised in more peaceful homes (Gottman, 2015).

In his studies, Dr. John M. Gottman found that even among young 3-month-old babies, marital conflict between parents **"makes it difficult for the baby to self-soothe, to restore physiological calm after being upset or overstimulated"** (Gottman, 1999, p. 29).

So it goes, even if there is no divorce, research indicates that:
"It is clearly harmful to raise kids in a home that is consumed by hostility" (Gottman, 2015, p. 8).

CONSEQUENCES OF UNHAPPY, HIGHLY-CONFLICTED MARRIAGES

For Adult Children

Similar to young adults who have had divorced parents, adults who have grown up with parents in conflict-ridden marriages are likely to experience an increased amount of conflict and "lower relationship quality" in their romantic relationships
(Cui & Fincham, 2010, p. 340).

HOW CAN WE PREVENT OR REDUCE DIVORCE & MARITAL DISCORD?

THERAPY?

According to research, "**more people seek therapy for marital problems than for any other type of problem** (Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan 1981)" (Gottman, 1999, p.4)

However, based on his research, Dr. John M. Gottman also indicates that **marital therapy is often not highly effective for struggling couples, that relapse for couples after treatment is high, and a strong correlation exists between receiving marital therapy and obtaining a divorce** (Gottman, 1999).

THERAPY VS. PREVENTION

"**Therapy and counseling interventions** typically occur
once problems have been well established"
(Murray, 2005, p. 28).

"**Prevention** work aims to intervene early in the relationship
developmental process to improve client outcomes"
(Murray, 2005, p. 28).

-PREVENTION-
THE MOST EFFECTIVE CURE

"Early intervention is generally more effective
than crisis-response or therapy in promoting positive
developmental outcomes…"
(Silliman, 2003, p. 273).

**"Much deterioration in marriage happens in the first
5-10 years** (Glenn, 1998),"
so it makes sense to develop awareness and address potential
problems in the early stages of a marriage relationship,
particularly in the pre-marriage phase
(Stanley, 2001, p. 5).

3 LEVELS OF PREVENTION

- Universal

- Selective

- Indicated

UNIVERSAL PREVENTION

Universal prevention focuses on helping to
prevent problems from developing in the general population
(Murray, 2005).

*Example: Providing Marriage Education classes
for college students*

SELECTIVE PREVENTION

Selective prevention involves
working with select high-risk groups to prevent certain anticipated problems from developing
(Murray, 2005).

Example: Facilitating Relationship and Marriage Education Workshops for young adults who have experienced parental divorce

INDICATED PREVENTION

Indicated prevention involves
minimizing the effects of problems that have already emerged in particular clients
during the earlier stages of problem development
(Murray, 2005).

Example: Providing Pre-Marital Counseling to an engaged couple that is already experiencing manifestations of relational problems and conflict

THERAPISTS & PREVENTION

Most therapists provide prevention at the indicated level and treat clients with more severe and well-established problems (Murray, 2005).

Treating severe and deeply entrenched problems in therapy is important work, however, **MFTs, along with other educators and providers, can also be instrumental in providing earlier intervention and prevention services** to effectively promote and support healthy relationships and marriages.

PRE-MARITAL EDUCATION AS PREVENTION

EFFECTIVENESS
OF PRE-MARITAL EDUCATION

A 2006 survey of over 3,000 married adults in the U.S., found that those who had participated in pre-marital education were **31% less likely to divorce** than those who had not participated in pre-marital education
(Stanley et al., 2006).

In addition, this study found that participants in pre-marital education experienced **"higher levels of marital satisfaction, lower levels of destructive conflicts, and higher levels of interpersonal commitment to spouses"**
(Stanley et al., 2006, p. 122).

PHASES
OF PRE-MARITAL EDUCATION

The Catholic Church, "a strong proponent of premarital education," articulates **three primary stages of marriage preparation** (Stanley et al., 2006, p. 122; USCCB, 2009):

Remote

Proximate

Immediate

REMOTE MARRIAGE PREPARATION

According to the United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops (2009):

- Remote preparation for marriage begins in childhood

- Is the general preparation that children receive based on the love and care of their married parents

- Is influenced by the values and virtues children learn as the grow and develop

PROXIMATE MARRIAGE PREPARATION

According to the United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops (2009):

- Occurs primarily in adolescence and young adulthood

- More direct preparation for marriage including education from family, the church, school, etc. regarding "healthy relationship sexuality, the virtue of chastity, and responsible parenthood" (USCCB, 2009).

IMMEDIATE MARRIAGE PREPARATION

According to the United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops (2009):

- Occurs in adulthood with engaged couples or an individual discerning marriage with a particular person

- Important to reflect on qualities needed for marriage: "the ability to make and keep a commitment, the desire for a lifelong, faithful relationship, and openness to children" (USCCB, 2009, p. 44-45)

- Important for couple to discuss values, refine communication skills, reflect on other relevant issues that may affect current relationship or future marriage

KEY TOPICS
OF PRE-MARITAL EDUCATION

- Communication, Conflict Resolution, Problem-Solving

- Gender Roles in Marriage

- Sexuality

- Commitment

- Finances

- Personality, Lifestyle, Friends

- Children, Parenting

- Religion, Spirituality, Values

- Family Background

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