

# Can Kids Get Smart About Marriage?

## A Veteran Teacher Reviews Some Leading Marriage and Relationship Education Programs

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by *Marline Pearson*

A Report for the National Marriage Project in **The Next Generation Series**

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### **Preface**

Each year, a million American children go through the experience of parental divorce. Roughly another million children are born each year to unwed mothers. Still others grow up with married parents who are emotionally estranged or persistently at war with each other. As a consequence, young people often grow up with little or no direct experience of a good and lasting marriage. The absence of good models of marriage<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and the seeming omnipresence of so many bad and failed marriages<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> has taken a toll. In survey after survey, young men and women express growing pessimism about their chances for a successful marriage. Their lack of confidence in their own capacity to achieve a good marriage is all the more poignant because surveys also indicate that today's young people identify a happy and lasting marriage as one of their highest personal goals in life.

Marriage and relationship education represents one potentially promising approach to helping young people achieve this personal life goal. Marriage educators believe that it is possible to teach the habits, dispositions, aptitudes and skills that make for a happy and lasting marriage. They point out that their approach is preventive, cost-effective and useful in a variety of settings, in and out of the school classroom.

Marriage and relationship education covers a broad range of activities, approaches, and target populations. Some courses focus on teaching skills in communication and negotiation; others focus on concepts and facts. Some marriage and relationship courses are part of a health or sex education curriculum; others are part of character education; still others are integrated into English or psychology courses. Most commonly, marriage and relationship programs are designed for middle and high schoolers, engaged couples, and married couples, but they can also be valuable for dating singles who are in college or who have completed formal schooling.

Increasingly, public officials are turning to marriage and relationship education as one way to strengthen marriage and prevent divorce. Florida is the first state in the nation to require a course in relationships and marriage for all high school graduates. Elsewhere in the nation, teachers and others who work with school-age children are incorporating units on healthy relationships into existing curricula or offering marriage and relationship courses as electives.

Although enthusiasm for marriage and relationship education is growing, many teachers, public officials, parents and youth workers are unaware of these programs or unable to find descriptive information about

marriage and relationship curricula.

The National Marriage Project commissioned this study to provide an overview of some of the more popular and promising marriage and relationship education programs currently in use. This report is not comprehensive in its scope nor does it offer a scientifically based evaluation of program effectiveness or outcomes. It does not attempt to take up broader questions about pedagogical methods and philosophy. Rather, it sets out to describe the target audience, content and focus of some of the available programs. Its purpose is to inform teachers, policymakers, journalists, parents and the public about these programs and to provide current information on training, price, and program contacts.

Marriage and relationship education is a work in progress. Some of the programs have been in use for some time but others have been developed recently and are still being fine-tuned and tested in the classroom. Most programs are short in duration, sometimes limited to a few weeks or even a few hours. They are also limited in their focus. Some concentrate on teaching a few useful communication and conflict resolution skills. Others focus on providing a broader conceptual context for love and sex than is found in the "health and risk factors" approach to sexuality education. A select few deal explicitly with mate selection and marriage itself. For all these reasons, the proponents of marriage and relationship education are reluctant to make sweeping claims about their approach. They do not claim that they offer a magic bullet solution to the problems of divorce, unsatisfactory marriages or faulty mate selection. Nevertheless, marriage educators do believe that they can teach young adults how to increase their chances for success in building and sustaining more satisfying and enduring love and marital relationships.

There is a substantial body of knowledge on marriage and relationships. Some of this knowledge is based on social science research. Some is rooted in classical thought and literature on mating and marrying. Properly taught, such knowledge can help young people sort out and make sense of the confusing and mixed messages in the popular culture about love, dating relationships and marriage. At the very least, marriage and relationship education can help dispel some of the popular misconceptions about sex, love, living together and marriage.

In a broader sense, marriage and relationship education is part of a growing effort across many disciplines and sectors in the society to prevent unhappy marriages and divorce and to increase a couple's chances of achieving a good and lasting marriage. Critics say that such efforts are well meaning but wasted. Change is impossible, they argue. On the other hand, marriage educators say such efforts are worth trying. Change is possible, they say. In this regard, marriage and relationship education belongs to the "can-do" tradition in American social reform and deserves thoughtful consideration as well as cautious optimism.

*Barbara Dafoe Whitehead*

*David Popenoe*

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### **About Marline Pearson**

**Marline Pearson is a social science instructor at Madison Area Technical College, a two-year college in Madison, Wisconsin. She currently teaches criminology and marriage and family courses as well as classes on relationship skills. In addition, she conducts assessment and teaching strategy courses for instructors in her college's faculty development program.**

**To prepare this report, she visited classrooms around the country to observe how the marriage and relationship courses were taught. She talked to students and teachers. She interviewed educators**

and researchers who designed these curricula. Having completed formal training in several of the programs and attended numerous informal training sessions in others, Ms. Pearson has taught or drawn upon elements of these programs in her own courses at the college and for workshops in her community. Aside from courses at the college, she has taught portions of these programs to young people in a variety of settings: at an alternative high school, in a prevention program for high-risk middle school girls, and to high school students at her church. She also has conducted training and staff development workshops in relationship and marriage education for middle school to college level teachers, college counseling and support staff, juvenile corrections treatment workers, and those who work in community-based youth development and prevention organizations.

As a teacher and as an advocate for marriage and relationship education as part of comprehensive youth development, Ms. Pearson brings her own lively impressions, experience and observations to bear upon her review of these select programs.

## Introduction

### A New Kind Of Poverty Among the Young

I teach students at a large two-year college in Madison, Wisconsin. During more than 20 years of teaching social science and criminology, I have focused mainly on the social, economic and environmental factors that put children and communities at risk. But in recent years, I have found it hard to ignore the social science evidence on the association between declining wellbeing among youth and changes in family structure and marriage. I've shifted the focus of my courses to include material on family and marriage as a result. But more than anything else, I've listened to my students, and it is their stories that have led me in a new direction.

My students come from many different ethnic and family backgrounds. They are often the first in their family to go beyond high school. They tend to be older than the average four-year college student. Some of my students are single parents, struggling to care for their children and to improve their lot in life.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have seen a new kind of poverty emerge. It is the poverty of broken bonds. This poverty is placing an extra layer of disadvantage on young people. I see my students, who have historically carried economic burdens, struggling with new emotional burdens. When I first started teaching, I rarely had a student who was on antidepressants or in therapy. Today, many are. My students also bear the burdens of premature family responsibilities. I think of a 21-year-old male student who lingers after class to ask me for childrearing advice. He is raising his one-year-old nephew because his sister, the child's mother, is too overwhelmed to do so. I think of another young man, 19, who lives with his 18-year-old-sister and her one-and-a-half-year-old son. Both teenagers work full-time, go to school and care for the little boy. Their own father has been out of the picture for years, and their mother is incapacitated with depression. Yet another 21 year old, the son of divorced professional parents, has fathered two children outside of marriage.

But that is not the most worrisome aspect of this new kind of poverty. What troubles me more is that many of my students think their circumstances are normal. They think it is normal to be on Prozac, to live in chaotic family situations, to be responsible for young children who have been left to their care by overwhelmed or incompetent parents. I am reminded of a clinically depressed twenty-year-old student who came to me after Christmas vacation with the news that her father, who had not seen her for years, had rebuffed her when she visited him and his new wife. Astonishingly, she had nothing but sympathy for her father. She could understand his discomfort, she told me, and before she left, she reassured him that she expected nothing from him. "Expecting nothing" is all too common among many students I teach.

This norming of low expectations carries over into my students' intimate relationships. Too many of my female students expect too little from the men who father their children. And too many young men naively think that they'll be able to be a good father without living with the child or marrying their child's mother.

Although some scholars tell us that we are entering a brave new world of relationships, with divorce and father absence common in childhood, living together instead of marrying common in young adulthood, and going it alone instead of raising children together common in parenthood, this is most decidedly *not* the world my students want. They want a world of secure and loving family bonds anchored in time and place by an affectionate, respectful and lasting marriage.

Yet despite these aspirations, many of my students are likely to fail. They are confused and misguided about the differences between sex and love, living together and marriage, manhood and fatherhood. They get little help or accurate information from their elders. The Baby Boom generation, veterans of the sexual and divorce revolution, has little to say, and certainly not much good to say, about marriage. This leaves young people like my students with few clues as to how they achieve a goal they almost universally seek. They have to try to figure it out by themselves.

But the sad truth is that it is hard to figure out marriage on your own. Most young adults in most societies across the world are able to depend on the teachings and traditions of the larger community in life matters as consequential as finding a lifelong mate and getting married. But very little guidance is available in our society today, and what guidance there is comes from Hollywood and Madison Avenue. As a result, young adults are floundering and often failing in their personal and family lives. Too many of my students make enormous gains in their school and work lives, only to lose ground because they get involved in yet another disastrous relationship.

This profound knowledge deficit, like budget or trade deficits, requires attention and action. The problem is not the lack of adequate knowledge. Indeed, we have a substantial knowledge base about marriage. We know something about the habits, competencies and skills for building successful marriages. We also know common patterns that undermine relationships and contribute to failure. We know how to help people identify, stop, exit from and repair negative patterns. And we know that these negative patterns are strikingly similar for rich or poor, Black, Hispanic, Asian or White, rural or suburban couples. Rather than a lack of knowledge, the problem has been one of transmitting existing knowledge and skills to people who want it and need it. Marriage and relationship education programs are designed to address this problem. Although the programs vary in content, audience and effectiveness, they all share one common premise: namely, that successful mate selection and marriage are not a matter of blind luck and that marital failure is not a matter of cruel fate. Marriage education holds out the promise that there are conceptual and practical tools available to help couples marry wisely, well and for a lifetime.

## **CONNECTIONS: Dating and Emotions**

## **CONNECTIONS: Relationships and Marriage**

**In a Word:** These two companion curricula combine basic concepts on dating and marriage with communication skills and role-playing, including a marriage simulation activity for high school students.

**Audience/Age Level:** Middle and high school students

## **Overview**

**CONNECTIONS: Dating and Emotions** and **CONNECTIONS: Relationships and Marriage**, the two

components of the curriculum, both focus on relationship building for middle and high school students. **Dating and Emotions** is designed for eighth to tenth grade students; **Relationships and Marriage** is aimed at older high school students. Together, the two cover a wide range of learning activities on youthful love, relationships and marriage.

Both curricula combine knowledge about marriage and relationships with practical skills in communication, learning about self and building relationships with others. They use "best practices" teaching strategies to involve and motivate students. Such strategies range from role-playing to games to interactive group work.

Each curriculum contains 15 lessons divided into four units. Each can be taught either as a three-week program or as individual units. They can be integrated into courses in social studies, family life or health. **Connections'** lively activities make it attractive for community-based youth programs, such as faith-based or religious programs and juvenile corrections.

## **Background**

Charlene Kamper, a high school psychology teacher with an MA in Family Studies, has taught for 14 years at the secondary level in the California public schools. She realized that many of her students lacked positive models or support for building strong relationships and future marriage. She developed this curriculum to give students a stronger foundation and working knowledge of what it takes to have sustaining and successful relationships and marriage.

The Dibble Fund for Marriage Education, a nonprofit organization devoted to helping young people learn relationship skills, asked Kamper to integrate her marriage education curriculum into the material they had developed to create **Connections: Relationships and Marriage**. **Connections: Dating and Emotions** was developed later in response to requests for a relationships skills program for younger students.

## **Description**

**Connections: Dating and Emotions** includes four units: Getting Ready, Going Out, Defining the Relationship, and Starting Over.

This curriculum is designed to help students in the eighth through tenth grades develop insight into their own expectations and readiness for dating relationships. It deals with many of the very basic and practical concerns of young teens, such as what to say to someone you like, how to politely decline an invitation to go out and generally how to relate to others in a dating situation. Early heartbreak, a common teen experience, is covered in four lessons. The lessons explore many topics, including why relationships change or end, the "hows" of breaking up, and how to deal with the past and move forward. Relationship problems are also discussed. One lesson uses scenarios and monologues to help students deal with problem personalities. Another lesson identifies destructive communication patterns most damaging to relationships. Another group activity helps develop awareness of patterns that might lead to emotional and physical abuse.

But the curriculum focuses on more than relationship problems. It teaches students to develop self-awareness and self-confidence in their dating relationships and encourages them to go slowly and get to know someone well. A lesson "What's the Rush?" clearly spells out the variety of important ways to get to know someone. Activities offering practice in getting to know classmates more deeply follows. Another lesson explores how relationships grow and asks students to identify and discuss the emotions and activities appropriate to different stages of a relationship. Students also learn that lasting love requires mutual respect, caring about another's feelings and making intentional efforts to sustain the relationship.

**Connections: Relationships and Marriage** includes four units: Personality, Relationships, Communication, and Marriage.

This curriculum for high school students begins with lessons on how individual personality develops and shapes behavior and then moves on to friendship, family and romantic relationships. In the unit on communication, students learn about styles of communication as well as patterns that lead to misunderstanding, conflict and other communication breakdowns. Through exercises, skits, and role-playing, students practice listening skills, identify non-verbal forms of communication, and learn to send clear messages.

**Connections: Relationships and Marriage** teaches about the meaning, purpose and practical responsibilities of marriage. The final seven lessons are devoted exclusively to marriage. They examine the nature of true love and the difference between the "real thing" and fantasy, infatuation, and sexual attraction. In a marriage simulation activity, students are asked to find someone to marry. They can choose opposite or same-sex partners. The "couple" then goes through exercises designed to expose them to real life concerns in marriage and family. They draw slips from a grab bag that determine their occupations, family income, number of children and other family circumstances. Together, the couple constructs a family budget, decides on names for their children, and discusses how family responsibilities should be shared. The students also have to face a major family crisis. The crises (drawn from the grab bag) may range from an extramarital affair to unemployment to a serious illness or death in the family. The couple must decide what they will do to work through the crisis and discuss how the crisis will affect each family member. Partners must also design a vacation that is within the family budget and provides enjoyment for all family members. The test of a successful vacation is not the destination or the dollars spent but how well the vacation nurtures family relationships and creates meaningful time together.

## **Evaluation**

According to a recent study by Scott P. Gardner, a professor at South Dakota State University, high school students who take **Connections** are more likely than other students to report improved communications with parents, increased use of reasoning tactics in conflict situations, and more favorable attitudes toward premarital preparation and marriage counseling. The study was based on a pre- and posttest survey of students who took **Connections** compared to a control group of similar students. Preliminary evidence from a second study indicates that children of divorced parents benefited most from the curriculum. After taking **Connections**, these students reported that they were less likely to use verbally aggressive tactics in resolving conflict and less likely to see cohabitation as a likely course for them before marriage.

I've taught portions of **Connections** to high-risk middle school girls as well as students at an alternative high school. It works, and works well. **CONNECTIONS** was also well received in a six-month staff-development program I ran for a collaborative initiative aimed at high-risk girls. The public health nurses and neighborhood youth center staff who attended especially liked the concrete activities and the fact that the curriculum gave them ways to go beyond the narrow health focus of conventional sex education in talking to girls about relationships.

**Connections** is noteworthy for its content and teaching strategies. Kamper clearly has her finger on the pulse of teen concerns. She has selected the topics and questions that students need and want to address.

Moreover, **Connections** incorporates teaching strategies that reflect the experiences and wisdom of a master teacher. As any teacher knows, role-play and simulations can fall flat if they are not classroom-tested and engaging for the students. With **Connections**, the students are up and moving, doing, talking. There is a satisfying hubbub in the classroom. Moreover, the curriculum includes activities for students who learn in different ways. It is well suited for students across a broad spectrum of abilities, learning styles, and

ethnic backgrounds.

One of the distinctive features of **Connections** is its focus on marriage. It deals concretely with some of the practical challenges that arise in a marriage once the wedding is over. I've introduced **Connections** to scores of family life and consumer studies educators. A few teachers have wondered about the relevance of the marriage simulation activity for students who come from families and communities where marriage is uncommon. However, according to Charlene Kamper, the students in her multicultural, multiethnic classrooms are especially attracted to this feature. Similarly, I find students, who are without models of marriage, among the most eager to talk and learn about it.

**Connections** is easy to use. The instructions are clear and nearly foolproof. It is used at 585 locations; in 42 states and eight countries in addition to the United States.

### **Components, Teacher Training and Prices**

Each **Connections** curriculum includes an instructor's kit with a teacher manual, lesson plans, transparencies and handout masters, activity and game cards along with 30 student workbooks. The complete package is \$250.00. Additional workbooks are available in packages of ten for \$55.00. An introductory package that includes one instructor's manual and one student workbook is available for \$95.00 apiece. No teacher training is required although it is available on request.

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### **PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program)**

**In A Word:** A comprehensive compilation of skills, exercises and strategies for improving communication, managing conflict, and preserving and enhancing relationship satisfaction.

Young men like PREP's emphasis on doing rather than talking.

**Audience/Age Level:** Young adults. The first segment of PREP is appropriate for older teens as well.

### **Overview**

**PREP** is a twelve-hour skills-based program. The first six-hour segment focuses on communication and conflict management. The second six-hour segment deals with friendship, intimacy and commitment. Though **PREP** is commonly used with engaged or married couples, it can be equally useful for young single adults. The first segment contains material on conflict and communication that can be extremely valuable in

workshops and classes for teenagers as well. Additionally, the book used in **PREP**, *Fighting for Your Marriage*, provides an essential background resource for anyone working with young people in marriage education.

## **Background**

**PREP** developers, Howard Markman and Scott Stanley, have studied marriage for more than 20 years. According to their research, one of the key predictors of future marital distress is how couples communicate with each other before they marry. Prompted by these findings, Markman, Stanley, and their colleagues began to develop, refine, and test an intervention program designed to teach skills that would lead to more effective communication and more satisfying marriages. Their work, funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health, is ongoing.

## **Description**

**PREP** helps couples listen, repeat and feed back what each has heard, a communications practice called Speaker/Listener. This technique fosters a more accurate and active style of listening<sup>3/4</sup> one that may lead to better communication.

**PREP** also teaches couples how to identify and counteract hidden or unfounded assumptions, faulty conclusions and other perceptual distortions that contribute to misunderstandings and miscommunication. Couples learn to recognize and deal with the bigger problems that may be the underlying source of seemingly trivial but heated disputes. **PREP** teaches skills and ground rules for reducing and exiting from conflict. For example, "time outs" are one way for angry couples to decompress and allow anger and agitation to subside. Men find this simple technique especially effective.

Many contemporary couples want to marry someone who is their "soul mate" or "best friend," but this kind of intimate friendship is often hard to sustain over time. For example, married couples may fall into a pattern where much of their everyday talk focuses on problems, family logistics, or "who's doing what" or "who's doing more." Very commonly, men clam up and become uncommunicative because they believe that "talking leads to fighting." **PREP** encourages more intentional and positive efforts to stay current with each other's daily experiences, concerns, joys, feelings, frustrations, and dreams. It provides practical tips and simple strategies for carving out friendship time and having fun together. In a simple exercise that everyone enjoys, participants create a card stack of ideas for dates.

Shared values are another important component of satisfying marriage, yet too few couples examine their core beliefs, or talk about their expectations for their married and family life. **PREP** teaches couples to reflect on their own core beliefs as well as to talk about their hopes and expectations for future family life. It emphasizes forgiveness as an important and often underestimated factor in maintaining and deepening marital intimacy and provides a step-by-step model for working through the process of forgiveness, using the skills learned in the first section.

**PREP** devotes two full chapters to commitment. It draws a distinction between "constraint commitment" which is the sense that one should or must stay together because of external pressures and "dedication commitment" which relates to a positive desire to stay and invest willingly. **PREP** stresses that both forms of commitment are important in sustaining marriage.

## **Evaluation**

**PREP** is an excellent program for engaged or married couples. Its strategies and skills are easy to learn and to incorporate into everyday life. Couples appreciate the opportunity to practice these skills with their

partners.

Two separate small-scale evaluation studies of **PREP** show that it helps to prevent breakups and to improve the quality of marital satisfaction. Five years after they had taken a **PREP** course, married couples experienced one-third to one-half as many break-ups and maintained higher levels of relationship and sexual satisfaction with lower intensity problems compared to married couples who had not taken **PREP**. A larger study designed to test the effectiveness of **PREP** compared to other prevention programs is currently underway. An overview of the studies and their findings is available on **PREP**'s website.

I've taught **PREP** to college students as well as to a variety of others, including middle and high school teens and older adults in the community. I can attest to its broad appeal. In my students' written evaluations of their **PREP** experience, several themes recur. Students say the course helps them exit out of negative patterns such as angry reactions to put-downs or disrespectful comments. They report having skills to escape from a frustrating pattern of pursue/withdraw/avoid in their romantic relationships. Perhaps more importantly, they report that the communication and conflict-management skills help them repair relationships after they've had a fight.

**PREP** appeals strongly to my male students. When I explain that men and women handle emotional conflict differently, the young men in my classes actually sigh in relief. More to the point, they like the nontherapeutic, action-oriented approach to conflict and communication. I've had male students ask permission to bring their girlfriends to class.

**PREP**'s discussion of commitment also impressed my students. Before taking the course, most of my students understood commitment only in the sense of "stick in there whether you like it or not because society/religion/ says you should or must." **PREP** introduces students to dedication. Dedication commitment is about the desiring, self-imposed side of commitment. This is the kind of commitment that is strong at the beginning of relationships and brings romance and exclusivity to a relationship. This was truly one of the most intriguing insights for many of the students<sup>3/4</sup> a sort of "re-orient-your-thinking" type of experience. It gave them a new vision and broader understanding of commitment.

Conventional wisdom says that low-income or high-risk young people do not want or benefit from relationships or marriage education. However, my experience suggests otherwise. One young unmarried mother in a strained relationship with the father of her child took **PREP** with me and found that she had tools to avoid some of the problems and conflict. In her final reflection paper for the class, she revealed that the second part of **PREP** had inspired her and her child's father to try to rekindle their love. **PREP** offered them concrete ideas to begin. In fact, the skills-based approach of **PREP** so appealed to the father that he agreed to go to a "**PREP**-oriented" counselor to be further coached on their relationship. This suggests how promising **PREP** might be in helping unmarried young parents move towards more respectful relationships and possibly build the foundation for marriage.

After taking **PREP**, many of my students say that they have a better sense of what they are seeking in a future mate. As one student put it: "In my next relationship I'm going to pay more attention to whether or not we're even on the same page." Another writes: "When I think of expectations (which I never did before) I get a picture of how I want my life to be. It helps put everything in perspective and helps me set goals. When you're aware of what you want, then you learn what you have to do to make that happen. It's like you prepare and educate yourself so that you may live a life how you want it to be." And another says: "I see so many of my single friends struggling with their relationships . . . They really need to learn these tools . . ."

Finally, this curriculum is not only skills-based. It is also richly infused with recent social science research on marriage. **PREP**'s comprehensive attention to both research evidence and skills is one of its strongest

and most noteworthy features.

**PREP** is not a magic bullet that's going to fix all the problems in marriage but it does provide a practical approach to building a stronger foundation for successful mate selection and marriage. **PREP** offers an optimal blend of information and skills. My students want both. In addition to acquiring basic information, they desperately want to be able to *do* things differently. As one student wrote, "I knew communication was supposed to be important, but had no clue about how to do it."

### **Components, Teacher Training and Prices**

Teacher training is required to teach the **PREP** curriculum and to purchase course components. One-day training for teachers of the first segment of the course is held sporadically throughout the United States. The best information about single-day training locations and prices is available by contacting PREP directly. Three-day training workshops cost \$449 and are held four times yearly. The training provides attendees with the leader's manual and authorization to choose course components from PREP's catalog of books, manuals, video- and audiotapes, transparencies and even a board game. One of the texts central to the course, *Fighting For Your Marriage*, is loaded with exercises and is so clearly written that readers find it useful even without benefit of a course.

For those interested in faith-based formats, the curriculum is also available in a Christian format called CPREP. And, for Jewish couples, a text entitled *Fighting for Your Jewish Marriage* is available.

Since 1989, 3,900 teachers have been trained in the **PREP** program for use in 29 countries.

### **Contact Information**

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### **The Loving Well Project**

**In a Word:** This literature-based character education program devotes a major section of readings to marriage.

**Audience/Age Level:** Middle and high school students. May be used as supplemental material with young adults as well.

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## Overview

*The Art of Loving Well*, the centerpiece of the **Loving Well Project** curriculum, is an anthology of 41 short stories, poems, essays, dramas, and folk tales from classical literature and contemporary teen literature. Developed at Boston University, this literature-based character education curriculum addresses the rich complexities, challenges and joys of a wide variety of relationships, including friendships and family, infatuations and first romances, and enduring commitments and marriage. Writing assignments, role-playing ideas, discussion prompts, drawing, interviewing, and music projects and other suggested student activities accompany the stories. The **Loving Well** curriculum is used in hundreds of middle and high school classrooms with students at all levels. Indeed, according to its developers, the curriculum has had some of its most dramatic successes among chronically low achieving students. Many English teachers use *The Art of Loving Well* as a main text, while others integrate certain selections into their language arts classes. Teachers of health, family life or sex education supplement their courses with the stories and activities from the anthology. The program has also been used in community youth groups and religious youth groups. A few community programs for high-risk youth are using it as well.

## Background

**Loving Well** began as a teen pregnancy prevention project developed by Boston University's School of Education and funded by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs. Its purpose was to help middle school students postpone premature sexual activity by encouraging them to read and reflect on stories about love, commitment and marriage. Project Director, Nancy McLaren, who designed the **Loving Well** curriculum and had earlier developed other character education curricula, calls it an "anti-impulse" curriculum. She believes that students who develop a set of strong personal ideals and aspirations about love and commitment are better able to resist peer pressure to engage in sex.

## Description

The stories and accompanying exercises teach that the "art of loving well" is a slow, cumulative process. They encourage students to distinguish appearances, infatuation, and sexual involvement from true love. Perhaps most importantly, the **Loving Well** curriculum seeks to encourage a long-term view of love and commitment. Notably, it includes a number of stories about good and lasting marriages as well as sample wedding vows from several different traditions.

The selections in this anthology are organized around three broad themes: Early Loves and Losses, Romance, and Commitment and Marriage. The first section begins with an exploration of love and commitment within family relationships and with the earliest experiences with love. For example, "If Only," a story about the loss of a loved one, encourages teens to think about those they love, what their love relationships mean to them, and how they can nurture such relationships. Students are asked to write a letter to someone who is important to them as if it is their last opportunity to do so.

Selections in other sections examine love and commitment over a lifetime. For example, "The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson," by Leo Tolstoy shows how people we love can and do become less attractive and lovable at times. The class activities, which accompany this story, lead to a discussion of what nurtures commitment. Some stories explore the early and often bungling first attempts at love. They evoke the doubts, mistakes, passions and attractions that are part of teenage relationships, love, and sexuality. Other stories, such as "Appointment with Love," portray passionate love based on a deep friendship and shared values; still others attest to the power and potential of mature love and authentic commitment.

## Evaluation

As a requirement of its federal funding, the **Loving Well** curriculum has been independently evaluated. From 1987 to 1992, the curriculum was field tested by approximately one hundred teachers among ten thousand students in inner city, suburban and rural communities of Massachusetts, Maine, and South Carolina. The evaluation study compared attitudes of eighth grade students in the **Loving Well** classes with similar students who did not take the class. The results, based on data gathered through a pre- and posttest design, indicated that students who took **Loving Well** were more likely than students in the control group to have changed their attitudes. Students in the experimental group were significantly more likely to believe that people should not pressure others into having sex with them; that they themselves intended to say "no" if pressured to have sex; and that they did not intend to have sex as a young teen. The attitudinal changes correlate with postponement of sexual activity. Among the control group of eighth graders, twenty eight percent became sexually active by the end of eighth grade, compared to eight percent of those exposed to **Loving Well**.

According to Nancy McLaren, **Loving Well** is effective because it uses literature to capture the emotional nuances and subtleties of love. It gives students a language to express what cannot be expressed with statistics about risk factors or disease prevention. Moreover, she says, good literature provides a route into matters of intense personal interest to adolescents without requiring students to "get personal." By "listening" to the characters in the stories and discussing what they have detected in the character's actions, students can reflect on common adolescent life experiences from an emotional distance. Indeed, the story selections in *The Art of Loving Well* offer a non-threatening way to grapple with such socially sensitive and often personally painful issues as the impact and meaning of divorce, the experience of fatherlessness, and unwed teen childbearing. Accompanying suggestions for activities encourage conversations with parents and other adults. A video for parents is included in the teaching materials, one of the noteworthy features of the Loving Well Project. And exercises are included to encourage parent-child discussion.

I've used *The Art of Loving Well* with mainstream high schoolers as well as with adolescents in juvenile correction programs. My own classroom experience with this curriculum has been positive for both groups. In general, I and other teachers have found that students remember stories longer than facts. Moreover, the stories often create greater interest in learning both skills and information. For example, "A Distant Bell," a story dealing with divorce, can make the class more receptive to social science findings on the impact of divorce as well as research on marriage. Without the story to engage them, my students' eyes might have glazed over at yet another informational presentation.

Teaching this curriculum is rewarding. Students love these stories. Most of the stories are short enough to be read aloud in class and the accompanying activities are highly engaging, even for students who tend to say little in discussion. They are challenging for highly functioning students, yet some of the greatest successes have been with the highest risk teens—many of whom have problems with literacy. To be greeted everyday upon entering the classroom with, "What story do we get to hear today?" is truly heartening. It is even more gratifying when students demonstrate that the stories have made a difference in their lives. For example, after participating in a **Loving Well** course, one of my 16-year-old female students decided to break off an unhealthy relationship with a 24-year-old man. As she told me, "I now know more about what I want in a relationship and I'm worthy of better love."

In my experience as a teacher, I find that young people are more powerfully motivated by positive visions and ideals than by warnings to avoid the negative. Unfortunately positive visions and ideals are precisely what are in short supply for so many of today's teenagers. Also, sex education and family life curricula too often focus on individual health<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> promoting physical health, self-esteem, and self-actualization—and neglect the relational aspects of love, commitment, fidelity and trust. The stories in *The Art of Loving Well* help students reach for this higher ground.

## Components, Teacher Training and Prices

Teacher workshops are available by contacting the Loving Well Project. However, training is not required to teach the curriculum or to integrate *The Art of Loving Well* anthology into other programs. The anthology is available for \$19.95 per copy with discounts available for quantities of more than 20. The teacher's guide is \$10. Two videos, one for teachers and one for parents, are available for \$10 each.

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## WAIT Training and the Friends First Network

**In A Word:** This sexual abstinence curriculum teaches sexual refusal and relationship building skills. It is included in this review because it places a major emphasis on early dating relationships and offers practical ways for parents to join together to share information and establish common standards for dating.

**Audience/Age Level:** WAIT Training is for teens (eighth through tenth grades). Young teens (fifth through seventh grades) participate in the Friends First Clubs, and older teens serve as mentors for the clubs.

## Overview

**WAIT (Why Am I Tempted?) Training** is a sexual abstinence program for teenagers. However, its developers do not focus on abstinence alone. Rather, they place sexuality within the larger context of mature love and marital commitment. They call their approach "love education." The **WAIT Training** curriculum includes a peer support component, the **Friends First Network**.

The three-pronged approach of this program offers:

- Evidence on the importance of building satisfying and mature love relationships;
- Skills and strategies to help teens postpone early sexual involvement;

- Peer mentoring support through the **Friends First Network** clubs.

The program can be used in a variety of settings and formats. The core curriculum, the "speaker's bureau model," is available with slides to assist presentation and can be delivered in time slots ranging from 90 minutes to four hours. This makes it easy to plug **WAIT Training** into almost any class in any number of disciplines. An expanded version, the "classroom model," is suitable as a supplement to health and family life classes. This longer version generally includes stories from *The Art of Loving Well* (See **Loving Well**) and includes reproductive, contraceptive and STD information.

## **Background**

**WAIT Training** was developed by Joneen Krauth, a registered nurse and mother of four, and Lisa Rue, a former high school special education and sex education teacher.

In the early nineties, Joneen Krauth began a series of discussions with teens in her local area. She soon discovered that the teenagers had learned a lot about reproductive biology, physiology of sexuality, and contraceptives, but that they had no one to talk to about romantic love, dating relationships, and marriage.

About the same time, Lisa Rue, a high school teacher responsible for helping high-risk teens make a transition into the job world, realized that all her best educational, job-building, and social support efforts were often undone when her students got involved in turbulent intimate relationships. This pattern of derailment was especially common among female students who were sexually involved with older men.

While Lisa was searching for ideas and resources, she met Joneen. For two years the two women read curricula and investigated programs designed to build healthy relationships. A handful of doctors, teachers, nurses and parents supported their efforts. Among the programs they found most inspirational was Best Friends, a multi-year, school-based program for high-risk girls that focuses on character development, friendship, planning for future education and postponing sexual involvement.

## **Description**

The core **WAIT Training** curriculum is studded with a series of "hook" questions such as "Who's having the best sex?" to pique student interest and help introduce key concepts and information. In the longer version, stories from *The Art of Loving Well* and attention-grabbing analogies are attached to each concept. Included are interactive exercises, hands-on activities, and role-playing to support concepts and build skills.

A number of lessons focus on defining love, intimacy, and sexuality. For example, one helps students distinguish love from lust or infatuation. Other lessons in this unit underline the foundational importance of friendship to relationships and describe the building blocks for healthy relationships. A lesson entitled "Basic Needs of the Heart" explores the human need for love and acceptance and serves as the lead-in to the curriculum's exploration of sexuality.

**WAIT Training** teaches that physical connection is only one part of sexuality. It emphasizes that sexuality includes emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual components as well.

This curriculum helps students develop the confidence and skills to say "no" to early sexual involvement and to "wait until marriage." There are a number of activities to help sexually active teens rethink their decisions to engage in sex. The curriculum also pays attention to dating<sup>3/4</sup> how to keep it fun, creative, and intimate without being sexually involved. There are a few activities on mate selection as well.

Empirical findings on the health and economic benefits of marriage, the risks associated with family

disruption and cohabitation, and the results of recent sex research are integrated into the curriculum. Acknowledging the pressures and difficulties presented by the popular culture, **WAIT Training** also teaches kids to apply critical thinking skills to evaluate media messages and to resist peer pressure.

## **Friends First**

**Friends First Mentoring Program**, a complementary component of **WAIT Training**, recruits and trains older high school students to mentor students from the fifth to eighth grade. In Longmont, Colorado, where the first comprehensive **Friends First Mentor Program** was launched, groups of fifth and sixth graders meet at lunchtime or after school. These groups, **Friends First Clubs**, are led by high school students. The goal is to develop character and friendship skills as well as to simply have fun. After-school club activities include homework, recreation such as tae kwon do, skits and other activities to highlight the club's "character trait of the month." Older peers in **Friends First** begin to talk to seventh graders about dating and relationships.

The **Friends First Network** also offers parent education. It has pioneered the idea of "dating co-ops," parent networks to help parents share information about early dating activities, set and enforce common standards of conduct, promote the development of healthy relationships and foster an adolescence free of the worries and responsibilities of early sexual involvement. It also runs a telephone hot line, with recorded messages on topics ranging from sexual refusal skills to "how do I tell if it's real love?"

The authors of **Friends First** are developing innovative approaches for sexually active teens. Their collaboration with the medical community has resulted in a "sexual cessation model" for healthcare providers. This model includes a protocol of dialogue questions to aid healthcare providers in getting sexually active girls to evaluate what they want and desire in a relationship.

## **Evaluation**

Two small-scale studies of **WAIT Training**, one focused on the speaker's bureau model and the other comparing the speaker's bureau model to the longer classroom model, found significant changes in student attitudes in pre- and posttest surveys. Men and nonvirgins were more likely to "affirm abstinence" after taking the classroom model. Included in the second study was a section asking students to rank order a list of 14 categories of information and skills, based on what they thought teens needed most. Contraceptive and reproduction information came in twelfth and fourteenth respectively, while "how to change life if started down the wrong road" and "how to build quality relationships not based on sex" came in first and second. (The study is available from Friends First.)

I traveled to Colorado to interview Joneen Krauth and Lisa Rue and to receive formal training in their program. This was my first encounter with a sexual abstinence program, and I was skeptical at first. However, after completing the training, reading through scores of student evaluations, and teaching portions of the program to students at an alternative high school, I became convinced that sophisticated abstinence programs like **WAIT Training** are on the right track.

To be sure, many educators prefer the value-neutral language of waiting until you are in a "loving and committed relationship." The problem with this is that many 14, 15, or 16-year olds are not developmentally capable of knowing what "mature and committed" means. Don't all young teens think their early crushes and loves are the real thing? Lisa Rue tells the story of a 13-year old sexually active girl who was broken hearted when her boyfriend ended their relationship. Asked if her mother ever talked to her about sex and relationships, she responded "yes," and added, "She told me to wait for someone special, until I was in a truly loving and committed relationship<sup>3/4</sup> and I was."

How are we to indicate to teens the level of commitment and maturity we mean? According to Rue, using the word "marriage" may be the clearest and most developmentally appropriate way to communicate to *young* teens the level of maturity and commitment they must achieve before they get involved sexually. (Of course, the way a parent or teacher would talk to an older teen or young adult about sex and marriage would be different from than the way they would talk to a preteen or young teen.)

Students who take **WAIT Training** respond positively to its approach. After taking the course, they say: "I never knew I had a choice," "I feel I have some tools now," "I feel I have some power," "All teens should get this."

This program could also be said to capture the imagination of adults. Perhaps there is no better testament to the appeal of the program than the reaction of a number of self-professed "reluctant and skeptical" teachers who were required by their school districts to attend **Friends First** training. By the end of the training, they were enthusiastic about going back and teaching it. As one of these reluctant souls recently said to Krauth, "I see now that this program is not about saying "no," but about saying "yes" to loving relationships and hopes and dreams.

### **Components, Teacher Training and Prices**

Training is required to become a **WAIT Training** instructor. Two-day training in the classroom model is available through Choosing The Best, a training organization under contract to Friends First. Upcoming training dates and locations are listed on the Choosing The Best or Friends First website. The cost for the training is \$295. Materials, videos, workbooks, audiotapes for peer mentoring clubs are available through Friends First. To date about 900 teachers and speakers from 31 states have been trained in the use of this curriculum. Training in the mentor model, which includes an "on-site/in-the-classroom" practicum, is available twice a year. Friends First also conducts a summer National Stars Training for teen mentors.

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## Relationships and Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts

**In A Word:** Two faith-based curricula, one focusing on personal development and the other on preparing for successful marriage

**Audience/Age Level:** College students and single or engaged young adults. Some segments appropriate for older teens

### Overview

These two books, *Relationships: An Open and Honest Guide to Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great* and *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before (And After) You Marry* are the texts for two courses at Seattle Pacific University, a Christian college in Seattle, Washington. **Relationships** focuses on dating relationships while **Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts** introduces healthy marriage relationships. Student workbooks accompany both texts and contain dozens of practical self-tests and exercises. Each set can be a supplement for courses in psychology or marriage and family at the post-secondary level or a resource for programs serving young adults. When used with a course outline, available through the Center for Relationship Development, the sets can serve as course curricula.

Relationship and marriage educators who teach in secular settings may eliminate the explicitly Christian material and still retain much of what is valuable in the curriculum.

### Background

Les Parrott, a professor of clinical psychology, and Leslie Parrott, a marriage and family therapist, developed these curricula for college-age single adults. Co-directors of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University, the couple expected an enrollment of about 25 students when they first listed their course. Days before the course was to begin, however, the Parrotts learned that 150 students had registered. This unexpectedly high enrollment suggested a great hunger for advice and information about mating and marriage. They went on to develop a second course based on *Saving Your Marriage*, and both courses have remained among the most popular at the university.

*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* is also used for popular daylong seminars offered each spring around the nation.

The Parrotts are currently on leave from Seattle Pacific University to serve as scholars-in-residence at Oklahoma State University and "marriage ambassadors" for the Oklahoma Governor's statewide \$10 million marriage initiative.

### Description

#### Relationships

*Relationships: An Open and Honest Guide to Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great* and its accompanying workbook focus on mate selection and dating relationships. It applies psychological research to family-of-origin issues, gender differences, friendship, dating, and sexuality.

**Relationships** has nine units corresponding to nine chapters in the book.

The book begins with a series of chapters designed to point out the importance of personal growth and identity as a starting point for developing relationships. The authors point out that a solid sense of

self-worth can only come from hard work and taking personal responsibility for one's own destiny. The workbook offers a series of exercises grouped around four tasks: healing past hurts; taking off the masks; getting in the driver's seat by setting and pursuing goals; and exploring one's spirituality or purpose in life.

Included among the early chapters is a discussion of family of origin. Students are asked to consider the influence of their families, and that they can choose what to take and what to leave behind.

A chapter entitled "Crossing the Gender Line" highlights some commonly observed differences in behavior between males and females.

The next two chapters discuss friendships. Students learn that friends are not only good for the soul, but the body as well. Friendships help ward off depression, boost the immune system, increase the odds of surviving with coronary disease, keep stress hormones in check, and even extend life expectancy.

Students learn a useful concept: namely, that quality friendships in life generally come in two forms. There are "friends of the road" and "friends of the heart." According to the text, some friendships will eventually fade. Although such transient friendships can be worthwhile and valuable, the book explains, it is lasting friendship that most people seek. The authors concentrate on the communication skills required for sustaining deeper friendship, including a focus on good listening skills.

The textbook also explores why friendships fail. In the workbook exercises, students learn to determine whether a sinking friendship has any chance of staying afloat and, if so, how to repair it.

Other chapters deal with falling in and out of love. The Parrotts emphasize that it is possible to think clearly even when engulfed in the emotions of falling in love. They offer some useful techniques to help students evaluate whether they are choosing wisely and well.

For example, a short pretest, or, "Love I.Q.," examines existing student attitudes about dating and mate selection. Then the chapter introduces seven principles of "smart love," including building relationships on common ground; being authentic and true to oneself; steering clear of manipulation; recognizing and managing inevitable conflict; and communicating expectations about the dating relationship. A concluding point in this chapter is that love is not static. Even if one is blessed with a healthy, budding love relationship, the authors note, it's important to know that it will change and change again. Smart love, students are told, requires daily care and attention.

The next chapter examines why "sex-too-soon" derails romantic relationships. Citing the findings of recent sex research and surveys, this chapter points out that satisfying sex appears to be linked to committed relationships. Too often, it notes, couples who get involved sexually early on neglect the development of friendship and intimacy.

The authors encourage students to think about the context and meaning of sex. The Parrotts are not prudish in their discussion of sex. Workbook exercises lay out the stages of physical intimacy and ask students to link these to stages of emotional intimacy. These exercises are designed to help young adults develop personal standards as well as boundaries.

Students explore common reasons why people break up as well as why people stay in bad relationships. A list of probing questions offers guidance in assessing whether a relationship should be ended. Three pieces of advice are offered<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> make a clean break, avoid the blame game, and learn from it and move on. The workbook provides exercises to help work through each one of these three suggestions.

The final chapter, "Relating to God Without Being Phony," encourages spiritual questioning while

underlining the importance of one's spiritual development to relationship success. This is the most overtly religious portion of **Relationships**, and can easily be omitted with secular audiences.

### **Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts**

*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before (and After) You Marry* focuses on marriage preparation. The Parrotts examine the predictors of a successful marriage.

The first three chapters address marriage expectations and personal attitudes. The first addresses "myths" or unrealistic expectations of marriage like "we expect the same things from marriage," "everything good will get better," "everything bad will disappear after marriage" and "my partner will make me whole." The goal is to help young people develop realistic and healthy expectations for mutual growth and nurturance in a marriage.

The next chapter attempts to define love and explore how it changes, pointing out three sides to love: passion, intimacy, and commitment. Many of the problems couples experience are attributable to changes in these three sides of love. Most importantly, it offers strategies for cultivating passion, intimacy and commitment over the long haul.

The book also looks at attitudes that can make or break a marriage. Cultivating a "habit of happiness" is valuable, as is confronting the fact that no marriage, and no partner is perfect. The Parrotts especially caution against the poisons of self-pity, blame, and resentment that can sabotage a marriage.

The following chapters deal with several aspects of sustaining a satisfying marriage: communication, managing conflict, and developing spiritual life. The Parrotts discuss the rules and skills of good communication but note that communication skills may not be as important as the sense of warmth, genuineness and empathy partners have for each other. They underscore the differences between men and women and encourage empathy and "stretching" to meet a spouse's needs. Handling conflict is also discussed, including common problems that provoke arguments. The four most lethal conflict styles, based upon the PREP model, are described and rules for fighting are offered. (See **PREP**)

The final chapter explores the spiritual dimension of marriage. It makes the point that true "soul mates" share core values, and especially religious or spiritual values. Sharing core beliefs is a key predictor of marital harmony, the Parrotts say.

### **Evaluation**

This course covers some of the same material as **PREP**. However, the Parrotts's curriculum also focuses on mate selection and the practical aspects of building the *personal* foundation for marriage.

Particularly useful is its emphasis on family of origin and its influence on a young adult's mate selection and dating relationships. The text and exercises raise awareness about how families influence choices but they avoid victimization explanations. Instead, the book admonishes students to "get in the driver's seat" and make their own decisions about what to preserve and what to edit out of their own family of origin experience.

Similarly refreshing is the Parrotts's frankness about gender differences. They see positive value in the complementary differences between men and women, a welcome shift from the gender-neutral or gender chauvinist approaches in many college courses on marriage and family.

The insights and skill building on friendship are excellent. Since young people often say they want a spouse

who is a "best friend," they may benefit from learning skills on how to cultivate and sustain enduring friendships.

The Parrott curriculum is especially strong on dating and mate selection. This is a woefully neglected area, perhaps because marriage preparation courses tend to deal with people who have already selected a mate. The guidelines, insights, assessments, and questionnaires in this curriculum are particularly useful for young adults who are dating but have not yet decided to marry.

The curriculum discusses problems of casual sex in dating relationships without preachiness or prudery.

Finally the curriculum offers some good advice about breaking up. The list of questions for assessing whether a relationship is better off ended is thoughtful and comprehensive. It can serve as a useful reality check for students when needed.

Overall, **Relationships** and **Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts** are both valuable resources. I've tried out a number of the units from both curricula in my classes and students were very positive about the content as well as workbook exercises. The two books make great supplements to psychology or marriage and family classes. They'd be a wonderful resource for mini-courses, campus workshops, or programs for young working singles. I have also had great success using some of their material with older high school aged youth.

### **Components, Teacher Training and Prices**

*Relationships: An Open and Honest Guide to Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great* is available for \$14.45 along with its workbook for \$7.65. *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, is available for \$13.60 and its companion workbooks—one for men, one for women—are available for \$4.25 each. Copies of course outlines are available from the Center for Relationship Development, Seattle Pacific University, by calling (206) 281-2543.

Also available are two curricula designed for churches, one using the book *Relationships* and the other, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. Each complete curriculum includes a book, two videos of eight, half-hour sessions, along with Christian-based workbooks and leader's guide. The cost is \$120 for each curriculum.

Speaking schedules and locations are available on the Center for Relationship Development webpage.

### **Contact Information**

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## Building Relationships

**In A Word:** Basic information on marriage and family based on one of the most popular premarital compatibility inventories.

**Audience/Age Level:** High school students

### Overview

**Building Relationships** is a high school version of the standard marriage and family course found in many colleges. It helps students learn about a variety of interpersonal relationships, including friends, romantic partners and family. The text, *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life*, covers dating, mate selection, marriage, and parenthood as well as discussions of social trends affecting family life. Using classroom and homework exercises, students practice assertiveness, active listening and conflict resolution.

Each chapter can be covered in two 50-minute class periods. This makes it convenient for integration into semester long family and consumer science classes.

### Background

**Building Relationships** is based on PREPARE/ENRICH, a widely used premarital inventory developed by David Olson, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota. Olson also designed AWARE, a similar inventory for college students, as a premarital course for churches. A number of public schools also use the curriculum.

### Description

Each chapter of the textbook is anchored to a self-inventory based on AWARE. Students take the test, and their answers form the outline of points to be covered within each chapter. Reviewing each question in class offers opportunity for discussion while the instructor clarifies and offers information from the text.

Chapter one, "Marriage & Family Today," informs students about marriage, divorce and family structure trends. It points out the characteristics of strong families and some of the most common reasons for divorce.

Dating and mate selection is the topic of chapter two. The overall message of this chapter is that dating is an important vehicle for self-discovery, but when it comes to mate selection much more care is called for. It alerts students to the fact that the way a couple relates during dating will carry over into marriage, debunking the myth that problem behaviors or habits will disappear after marriage.

The next four chapters examine the transition from the dating relationship to marriage and parenthood. First, the authors list positive and negative reasons for marrying, and then point out the warning signs of a problem marriage. Students learn that fairly accurate premarital predictions can be made about marital success or failure, and most interestingly, that the likelihood of divorce can be predicted from the quality of the relationship before marriage.

The authors also teach that premarital programs can identify issues that might later become problems in marriage and may even have predictive value. Students are introduced to one of the most widely used inventories, PREPARE/ENRICH. They learn that they can improve their odds for a successful marriage by acquiring some basic skills.

The challenges of adjusting to a new marriage are also discussed. Pitfalls of the first two years of marriage are examined.

Especially noteworthy is an exercise designed to encourage young people to find out how their own parents changed their definition of love as they went through dating, engagement, marriage and, if applicable, divorce and remarriage.

The curriculum takes a frank look at some of the realities of parenthood, beginning with a sobering discussion of teen pregnancy and single parenthood. The authors point out that the greatest gift a mother and father can give their child is a good marriage. However, the authors explain, busy parents can often neglect their spousal relationship. A strong message of this chapter is that parents need to nurture their marriage. Also emphasized are the tremendous benefits involved fathers give children and mothers.

Beginning with chapter seven, the book examines specific relationship skills, attitudes and habits that contribute to the longevity of a marriage. In particular, it looks at communication skills and styles, with an emphasis on the different ways men and women communicate. Also discussed are ways of fighting fairly; leadership patterns and gender stereotypes; the influence of popular culture; budgeting, finances and credit cards; and the connection between self-image and personal choices.

The final chapter offers an in-depth and hands-on exploration of family of origin. Students respond to questions that help them reflect on their own family's closeness and flexibility, two characteristics that influence an individual's basic orientation to intimacy and family life. Through this exercise, students are able to see how their family of origin's behavior, attitude, and worldview might carry over into a future marriage. As a homework assignment, students are asked to have parents take the same inventory, an exercise that could stimulate parent-child conversations about marriage and family.

## **Evaluation**

I have been trained in and administered PREPARE/ENRICH, the premarital inventory developed by David Olson. I have also used AWARE, the inventory for college students.

**Building Relationships** can be useful for teachers who are comfortable with a more conventional approach to relationship and marriage education. The text is well organized with excellent background information for the teacher. The teacher's guide includes many good ideas for class activities and discussion. Homework assignments offer additional skill practice as well as encourage parent-child discussions. According to teachers, the organization of each chapter around an AWARE inventory sustains student interest—a real asset to the course.

**Building Relationships** emphasizes that marriage is something you prepare for and that marriage preparation can make a difference.

This curriculum also teaches the importance of building a good marriage before undertaking parenthood. It underscores the benefits of a good marriage and involved fathering for kids and parents.

However, from the standpoint of marriage education, the textbook could make a stronger case for marriage itself. For example, the chapter on financial decisions fails to note the economic and wealth-generating benefits of a long-term marriage, a matter of interest and importance to young people.

Another drawback to this marriage curriculum is its health-based, disease prevention approach to sexuality. Unlike other marriage education curricula under review, it pays little attention to the relational and,

especially, the marital context for sexuality.

Nonetheless, **Building Relationships** is a useful and comprehensive curriculum for standard high school courses on marriage and the family.

### **Components, Teacher Training and Prices**

The paperback student text, *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life*, costs \$9.95. A teacher's manual contains an overview of each lesson, key terms, classroom discussion ideas, life skill activities, homework assignments, and handout or overhead transparency masters. The cost for the text and manual is \$50.00 and is available from Life Innovations in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Formal training is not required. However, if desired, training is available from Life Innovations, Inc. and teachers who have taken the training find it valuable. A list of upcoming training dates and locations is available on the Life Innovations webpage. Teachers may purchase a course package, including the text, a teacher's manual, and also a copy of Olson and DeFrain's college text, *Marriage and Family: Diversity and Strengths*. This text contains additional background information and research for every topic covered in **Building Relationships**. This package is available for \$95.00.

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### **PAIRS for PEERS (formerly PAIRS Kids)**

**In A Word:** A relationship skills curriculum with many role-playing exercises in communication and conflict resolution. PAIRS Kids does not deal with romantic relationships or marriage but it is included in this review because it is used in some Florida public schools as partial fulfillment of the state mandated requirement for marriage education.

**Audience/Age Level:** Middle and high school students.

### **Overview**

**PAIRS (Practical Applications of Interpersonal Relationship Skills) Kids** is designed to help adolescents build better relationships with friends, family, peers, and other adults. The ten-lesson curriculum can be integrated into a variety of courses, including psychology, health, family life and consumer education. Middle and high school social workers and counselors also use **PAIRS Kids** in teen

support groups.

## **Background**

**PAIRS Kids** is adapted from the adult version of PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills). It incorporates the work of leading theorists and practitioners in family therapy and psychology. Schools began to use **PAIRS Kids** in the mid-nineties.

## **Description**

### **PAIRS Kids Basic Ten**

The ten-session core curriculum teaches skills in communication and handling emotions. **PAIRS Kids** begins with a motivational "hook" called the "Relationship Roadmap"<sup>3/4</sup> a simple tool for examining one's relationships. It serves as a springboard for learning that quality connections just don't happen but are based in good communication and understanding of self and others. Next students learn to identify unproductive or destructive patterns of communication and get practice in avoiding "stupid strike-backs." For example, students learn how to avoid acting on unfounded assumptions or hasty judgments. Students are introduced to the attributes of clear communication. Through **PAIRS** "Talking Tips, they practice techniques designed to clarify their feelings and thoughts and to express them in positive ways. For a week, students keep a journal of ways they feel cared for, and they practice talking about ways to show care and concern for others. The "Daily Temperature Reading" teaches them a five-point strategy for staying connected and current with those who are important to them.

**PAIRS Kids** teaches a few skills that are basic to virtually all successful relationships. For example, it teaches students how to keep their behavior in check in emotionally charged situations. Skills such as active listening as well as rules on fair fighting and safe venting of anger are taught. **PAIRS Kids** includes a lesson on forgiveness. Students learn why it is harmful to hold onto grudges and resentments, and they practice how to forgive. **PAIRS Kids** also provides guidelines for effective involvement by a third party or peer, a feature especially useful in peer mediation programs.

This curriculum is experiential. It involves students in a variety of activities, including drawing, writing, role-playing and self-inventories.

### **PAIRS Kids Level II and III**

Levels II and III are currently in development but available for review upon special request. The lessons contain experiential activities and assignments designed to foster greater self-understanding. Students continue to practice their communication skills while engaging in deeper investigation into their own family lives and experiences. One exercise is devoted to researching and diagramming a three-generation family history.

Lessons on character formation and development, "Inner Cast of Characters," explore specific ways students might strengthen their positive character attributes and control their character weaknesses.

## **Evaluation**

My evaluation of **PAIRS Kids** is based on interviews with Shirley Burnside and Lorie Russell, two guidance school counselors who have been leaders in its development, and on my own experimentation with several components.

**PAIRS Kids** appeals to teens because it gives them information and skills that they can use in their personal lives. It is the experiential aspect and the personal journey of self-discovery that engages them, according to teachers.

At Fenton High School in Bensenville, Illinois, for example, students who were exposed to **PAIRS Kids** in a support group wanted to repeat the class with a friend. Fenton school counselor Shirley Burnside reports that students who take **PAIRS Kids** often comment "I feel less bottled up, less angry, and know how to handle my emotions better." At Palm Springs Middle School in Palm Springs, Florida, **PAIRS** skills are fully integrated into the alternative program for high-risk students. Three hundred and sixty parents have taken the **PAIRS Kids** course with their teenage children. After taking the course, school counselor Lorie Russell says, some parents and students claim that they are finally able to talk to each other without shouting. The course is offered in both English and Spanish.

**PAIRS Kids** is more oriented to the concepts and language of popular self-help and therapy than other curricula. This may be a drawback for some. However, many social workers and counselors who work with troubled teens find **PAIRS Kids** useful as a supplement to their efforts to support students in their academic and job readiness pursuits. They argue that students who learn relationship skills are less likely to be derailed by problems in their personal lives and more likely to be successful in mate selection and future marriage.

### **Components, Prices and Teacher Training**

The curriculum guide for **PAIRS Kids I** costs \$45.00. It includes set-up instructions for presentation and student activities, background information on each topic for the teacher, and sequencing and time frames. A companion student workbook is available for \$18.00. **PAIRS Kids** can be taught in a variety of ways, ranging from extensive leader involvement combining lecture, discussion and activities, to moderate leader involvement in discussion and skills-building exercises, to student self-directed study.

Teacher training is highly recommended but not required. A number of training options are available. The most complete training for **PAIRS KIDS** is the four-day (30 hour) intensive PAIRS FIRST at \$695.00. Customized training for teachers, counselors, and others who work with youth is also available. One popular training model delivers the entire ten-unit, core program on-site to students and staff in a two-day format led by PAIRS senior staff. Students actually participate in the training while teachers observe. The cost for this option is \$95.00 per student with a minimum of 32 students.

### **Contact Information**

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## Partners

**In A Word:** A divorce prevention program designed to teach teenagers about marital conflict and the legal and social realities of divorce

**Audience/Age Level:** Middle school and high school students

### Overview

**Partners for Schools** is a divorce prevention initiative sponsored by the American Bar Association Family Law Section. It teaches relationship skills and basic concepts of family law.

This curriculum is designed to:

- give teens a first-hand understanding of some of the problems and conflicts in marriage;
- teach communication and negotiations skills they'll need to handle problems;
- make teens more aware of the complex realities of divorce.

### Background

Family law attorney Lynne Gold-Bikin is the driving force behind the creation of the **Partners** program. Like many attorneys who handle divorce cases, Gold-Bikin had been sending people to marriage counseling for years. But marriage counseling didn't seem to prevent divorce. By the time couples sought the advice of a divorce lawyer, she realized, it was too late to save the marriage.

When she became Chair of the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association, she decided to use her influence and expertise to promote prevention, but not in the old way of trying belatedly to patch up a badly damaged marriage. Bringing together a trainer for PAIRS with members of the community, she came up with an approach designed to teach school-age students about the realities of divorce as well as how to avoid some common problems they are likely to encounter in future marriages.

### Description

**Partners** comprises five two-hour units, each with its own video segment. The videotape follows a young couple with a newborn baby as they confront some of the most common sources of conflict in a marriage. Within each segment a legal concept is introduced and a communication skill taught. Five scenes are enacted by the couple<sup>3/4</sup> responsibility sharing, family income, childcare, premarital expectations, and domestic violence. First, an argument arises between the young couple and negative communication is exhibited. Next, a communication skill is introduced for helping the couple better handle their conflict. Finally there is a "redo" of the original argument whereby the couple uses their newly learned skill.

In each segment, a visit to a lawyer raises awareness about the difficult implications of a marital breakup. Legal concepts include the marriage contract, grounds for divorce, obligations for child support, custody, placement and visitation issues, and the penalties and protections surrounding domestic violence. Volunteer attorneys often participate in these classes to clarify how legal issues are handled in the students' own state.

After viewing the video, students engage in a series of role-playing exercises designed to gain hands-on practice with the communication and conflict management skills taught in that particular unit. The role-playing exercises focus on common conflict issues among dating teens. Homework assignments,

outlined in the curriculum guide, provide additional opportunities to apply concepts and skills.

A unit on domestic violence describes its scope, effects and legal sanctions.

**Partners** ends with a unit on mate selection. Students are asked to consider the qualities that would make a good mate and to draw a lifeline plotting out their expectations for work, family and personal activities in ten-year segments until age 90. The lesson culminates with interviews with happily married couples asking them about the secret to their success. The communication skill taught in this final lesson is the "Daily Temperature Reading" a five-point routine for maintaining connection with those you care about.

## **Evaluation**

I've used **Partners** selectively in my teaching.

There are several strong points to this curriculum. The engaging videotaped segments of real-life conflicts offer students a window on the common challenges of marriage and the vital need for good communication and conflict management skills. The role-playing exercises in the curriculum guide take believable problems from the world of teen relationships and provide opportunities to practice negotiation and communication skills. Finally, **Partners** disabuses students of any notion that divorce is an easy solution to marital problems. It takes something of a "scared straight" approach by pointing out the difficult realities of divorce.

**Partners** is short. It is a ten-hour course and can easily be incorporated into existing courses, a feature some time-pressed high schools may find attractive.

One major disadvantage is the narrow emphasis on the legal aspects of divorce, and on marital conflict. The course offers little information on the advantages and long-term benefits of marriage. As a consequence, some students may get the mistaken impression that marriage involves nothing but problems, conflict and the high risk of divorce.

## **Components, Prices and Teacher Training**

**Partners** is a self-contained, ten-session course designed to fit into high school social studies, health, family life or business law classes. The package of a five-part videotape and curriculum guide cost \$400. No special teacher training is required.

Attorneys, law firms, or bar associations sponsor **Partners** at some local high schools. Volunteer attorneys visit classrooms to help students understand how divorce, child custody, support, and related family law issues are handled in their particular states.

**Partners** has been purchased by 100 locations in 30 states.

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## REFLECTIONS

### Four Crucial Steps

Parents, teachers and others who teach and work with young people have both the opportunity and the responsibility to help young people to develop "habits of the heart" as well as to acquire the techniques and skills that will help prepare them for successful mate selection and marriage. To accomplish this larger goal, we must move forward on several fronts simultaneously. As I see it, four steps are crucial in educating young adults about marriage.

#### **Disseminate the findings of social science research**

Young people are woefully ignorant or misinformed about the basic research evidence on marriage. They know little about the economic, social, and personal benefits of marriage, for example, and they have many misconceptions about cohabitation, the responsibilities of parenthood, and what it takes to raise children successfully. Indeed, the inattention to empirical research on the benefits and advantages of marriage is a shortcoming of virtually all the marriage and relationship curricula reviewed in this report.

#### **Teach skills and insights that will foster healthy relationships and successful marriages**

Parents, teachers, clergy and other concerned adults can help young people develop their "relationship readiness." We can help them get smarter about mate selection and marriage. We should be thinking about making programs like the ones reviewed in this report as commonplace as sex education. Indeed, high schools should aim at comprehensive *relationship education*. And we should find ways to teach these skills to post-high school young adults who are actively engaged in mating and possibly entry into cohabitation or marriage. Religious organizations, HMOs, and community colleges might provide such education to young adults.

#### **Teach young people about the deeper meanings and traditions of marriage**

Marriage and relationship courses are not enough. To strengthen and revitalize marriage, we need to talk to young adults about the rich cultural, intellectual and religious traditions that have contributed to this institution. We are philosophically impoverished in our thinking about marriage. It is common to think about marriage as simply a vehicle for individual happiness or "couples" satisfaction. But it is more than that. It is an institution, with economic, legal, social and interpersonal dimensions, all richly interwoven. Marriage provides the structure for attaching fathers to children and for rearing, protecting and teaching children. It is a mediating force that helps work out the basic human tension between autonomy and mutual support. And importantly for young people today, marriage provides the context for sexual love.

The plain truth is that young people are bored with our current educational messages about sex. They have heard the lectures and demonstrations about body parts, protection from disease and risk-reduction. They want something more than this. And this should not surprise us. Young people are on a journey to learn about themselves in relation to others. They must chart their way through the tricky terrain of attractions, infatuations, jealousies, passions, and broken hearts. They need to understand the ingredients of a fuller and more meaningful sexuality that includes trust, intimacy, and faithfulness. Ultimately, they need to consider the fact that there is always a potential link between sexuality and the creation of life. Thus, young people

must understand, in conversation with parents, clergy and other trusted adults, what it means to create life, what our responsibility to life must be, and what a child needs and deserves from a father and mother.

### **Encourage and support parents as the "first teachers" in marriage**

Some of the programs reviewed in this publication offer ideas for helping parents talk to their children about love, commitment and marriage. The **Loving Well** program, for example, includes a companion video for parents. **WAIT Training** encourages parents to form networks or "dating co-ops" to establish and enforce common standards for early dating relationships. But much more must be done. Too often, the most important adults in young people's lives fall silent when it comes to talking about marriage. To be sure, the past thirty years have been confusing and turbulent times for the institution of marriage. But that fact does not argue for silence. It argues for an intergenerational conversation about marriage. What have been the gains and losses of the recent past? How can we help our children avoid some of the losses? Surely, this is one of the responsibilities of the elders to the younger generation. Most importantly, we need to listen to young people's dreams and desires. We need to do what we can to help them realize their dreams.

The programs described in this report represent a modest beginning. Marriage and relationship education alone will not reverse the trends of divorce and nonmarital childbearing. But it may help to start a desperately needed conversation about how we can repair and renew marriage and end the poverty caused by broken bonds.

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