

Strengthening Your Marriage

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Learning 1. Creating the story of your love

I have a tricky assignment for you. Listen carefully.

(Exercise 1)

Every relationship has pain. We tend to be very aware of it.

Every relationship has goodness. Sometimes we forget it.

Set aside the pain for now and study your relationship to find the light and goodness

What first attracted you to your partner?

What good experiences have you had together?

What are your partner's greatest strengths?

What do you enjoy doing together?

[Have participants work on Exercise 1.]

I hope you were able to think of many good things about your partner and relationship. I want to tell you a story. Eight-year-old Sara had a long-awaited birthday party. She and her friends had good food and a lot of fun playing games. It was an almost perfect day.

While playing with her friends, Sara stepped on a bee which bit her foot. The bite was painful and her foot began to swell up. Her mother had to take her to a doctor to get medicine for her foot.

What do you think Sara will remember about her birthday party?

Why might she remember the bite more than she remembers the good food and good fun?

Surprise, unexpected

Very painful

If the only thing Sara remembers about her birthday party is the bee sting, how will she feel about her birthday party?

If, as the pain goes away, Sara focuses on the good food and good fun, how might she feel about her birthday party?

This is much like marriage and couple relationships. Every relationship has fun times and good experiences mixed together with painful experiences and disappointments.

If, in a relationship, we think a lot about the pains and disappointments, we soon begin to resent our partner. We may wish we were not in the relationship.

In contrast, if we remember the good times and the positive qualities of our partner, the relationship is likely to become stronger and happier.

But how can we ignore the pain and think more about the good? What are your ideas?

[Discuss and have participants take notes on their exercise sheet.]

Some ideas to add to the discussion:

Avoid dwelling on the pain. Don't keep thinking about it.

When you feel pain, remember also the good.

Keep pictures and reminders of good times around you.

Make a list of good times and good qualities.

Try to understand your partner better and what he or she needs.

Our minds are a lot like gardens. If we just throw out a few tomato seeds and do nothing more, what happens?

[Lots of weeds grow! The tomatoes probably don't grow or get eaten up by worms.]

What is required to get a good crop of tomatoes?

[Pull weeds. Deal with bugs. Water. Be sure there is enough sun.]

What can we learn from growing tomatoes that can help us strengthen our relationship with our partner?

If we want to have a strong relationship with our partner, what things will we need to do?

[Notice the good. Spend time doing happy things together. Be willing to forgive. Ask for changes in nice ways. Don't think too much about problems.]

Return to the list you were working on at the beginning of our meeting. See if there is anything you want to add. Also, list things you can do to remember the good in your partner and think about it more.

There are many ways to write the story of our relationships. We may write a story of anger, ugliness and confusion. Yet, if we look for good, we can write a story of growth, kindness and joy.

Conclusion: In our next meeting, we will talk about ways to deal with problems in relationships. Between now and then, make extra efforts to notice what you like about your partner. If you want to share, we will give you an opportunity to share at our next meeting.

Exercise 1:

What first attracted you to your partner?

What good experiences have you had together?

What are your partner's greatest strengths?

What do you enjoy doing together?

What can you do to remember better the good things about your partnership?

Learning 2. What do we do about problems?

In the last meeting we talked about noticing and remembering the good in our partners. Do any of you want to share good experiences of noticing and remembering the good?

[Provide time for discussion.]

I hope you will keep working on this exercise. There are many benefits to looking for and remembering the good in your partner.

Does every relationship have problems?

[Yes!]

Sometimes it seems that there are just too many problems in a relationship! Sometimes we get discouraged with old problems that don't go away. No matter how much we talk about them and no matter what we try, it seems that some problems don't go away. That can be very frustrating! Sometimes the problems seem like they will break the back of the relationship---there are just too many!

Let's see if we can get a balanced view of our relationships. On good days many of us might estimate that we like about 80% of our partner. There is probably about 20% that bothers us. It is completely normal to dislike certain things about our partners---even in the best relationships. But most of us find most of our partner to be good.

The Good 80%	The Bad 20%
There are many things that you probably find pleasant and satisfying about your partner and your relationship!	Some things are irritating.
Area for appreciation	Area for negotiation

What happens to our relationship if we mostly think about and talk about the bad?

[Discuss]

What happens to our relationship if we mostly think about, talk about and appreciate the good?

[Discuss]

We may wonder if there is some way to make the good a bigger part of our relationship. Can we help our partner change so that we like 85% or 90% of him or her? Research has a surprise.

[Point to “The Bad” part of the chart.] John Gottman, one of the world’s best marriage researchers, estimates that 70% of what we don’t like about our partner will never change. We can pester and threaten and beg, but some parts of our partner just aren’t going to change! Why do you think that is so?

[Discuss. One reason may be that our habits are formed. Also, our good qualities are tied to our bad ones. We sure don’t want to get rid of the good ones!]

How can we deal with those parts that aren’t going to change?

[We can accept them. We can worry about them less. We can think more about the good.]

80%	20%	
	70%	30%
The Good	Bad that won't change	Bad that can change
There are many things that you probably find pleasant and satisfying about your partner and your relationship.	Some things are irritating.	
Area for appreciation	Accept	Love

Notice that there is part of the bad that can change. This may seem like a good area to help your relationship grow. But there is one problem. How do you feel when someone is trying to change you?

[Most of us get defensive or angry. We resist.]

Research shows that the only way to get your partner to change is by accepting him or her the way he or she is! Trying to make people change tends to make them resentful and resistant. Accepting and enjoying our partners the way they are opens the way to growth.

What ideas do you have for how we can accept imperfections in our partners and love them the way they are?

[Discuss]

One of the ways we can strengthen our relationship is by the give-and-take method. For example, I may be good at home repairs but I am not very good about picking up my socks. Perhaps my partner will forgive me for forgetting my socks---and maybe even put them in the laundry for me---and will appreciate my efforts at home repairs. Are there some ways that you are already helping each other out? For example, do some of you volunteer to do the laundry because your partner hates to? Do some of you make a point of caring for the children so your partner can have a few minutes to relax? Do some of you accept a messier house because it is not your partner's priority?

[Discuss]

Sometimes people get so fed up with their partners' faults that they choose to divorce. Most of them later re-marry someone else. Do you think their new partners have no faults?

[No matter who we marry, that person will have faults and shortcomings.]

There are some problems that a person should not have to accept. No one should be hit or beat up in a relationship. If that happens, you should get help. But most of the small irritations in a close relationship can be managed through forgiveness and acceptance or by requests. Let's talk about requests.

What is the likely reaction if you say the following:

"You have left your stinky socks on the floor again! I hate that! You leave your socks out every day! Do you think that I'm your maid? Do you think you have the right to be a slob? I'm sick of this!"

What is the likely reaction?

[An argument, hurt feelings and a damaged relationship.]

Think about the reaction if you said the following: "Putting socks in the laundry is probably not as important to you as it is to me. I just want to let you know that I really appreciate it when you do remember to put your socks in the laundry."

What is the likely reaction?

[Partner is more likely to put the socks in the laundry.]

What can you do if your partner still drops socks on the floor?

[Pick them up and be understanding that this is not your partner's strength. You may want to take time to consider other common complaints as described by participants. Compare our usual ways of complaining and criticizing with better ways of making requests.]

When we remember the good about our relationships, show understanding (“Putting socks in the laundry is probably not as important to you as it is to me.”), make requests rather than complaints, show appreciation for efforts, and forgive our partner for forgetting, what is likely to happen to the relationship?

[Better cooperation and closeness.]

Please take exercise 2 and see if you can think of specific problems you face in your relationship. Suggest ways to remember the good, be understanding, make requests, show appreciation for efforts, and be forgiving—and maybe even turn the problem into a strength!

[Circulate and help people complete the exercise. Discuss if appropriate.]

Thank you for being here today. At the beginning of our next session we will again provide a few minutes for you to share things you have learned to make your relationships stronger.

Exercise 2:

The Good	The Bad
There are many things that you probably find pleasant and satisfying about your partner and your relationship!	Some things are irritating.
Area for appreciation	Area for negotiation

Based on what I know about my partner and our relationship, I think I would be wise to remember the good

What are some good things in your partner and relationship?

be understanding

Based on what I know, what are some of the reasons this may be especially difficult for my partner?

make requests

Can you find a positive way to make reasonable requests?

show appreciation for efforts

What are some things that my partner tries to do that I can appreciate?

and forgive my partner for forgetting.

What are some things that my partner forgets for which I should readily forgive him or her?

Can you find a silver lining in this storm cloud? Can you see a way to turn this problem into a strength in your relationship?

Learning 3: Showing love effectively

If you were set down in the middle of Paraguay among people who only spoke Guarani, would you have a hard time communicating?

Probably there would be lots of misunderstanding. Surprisingly, humans are very different in the way they like to show and receive love. We call this their language of love. Sometimes we try to show love to our partner but it isn't appreciated. Sometimes we feel loving toward our partner but our partner doesn't feel loved.

What is something that someone in your family has done for you that made you feel especially loved?

[Allow several people to share. Show interest and support for every answer.]

You have identified ways you like to be loved. Do those same languages of love work for your partner, that is, does your partner like to be loved the same way you like to be loved?

[Probably not.]

Some people have said that there are three languages of love:

“Tell me” people want to hear words like “I love you.” “You're so important to me.”

“Show me” people may believe that talk is cheap. They want to see actions.

“Touch me” people love to hug, cuddle, or be held.

[You may write “Tell me” “Show me” “Touch me” on a poster or whiteboard.]

Is one of these languages of love more effective for you than the others? Which “language” describes how you like to be loved?

[Encourage comments. Comment on the different ways people like to be loved.]

There are so many ways in which people like to be loved! A way of being loved that works well with one person may not work at all with another person. For example, what are some different reactions to the words “I love you”?

[Answers will probably range from happiness to discomfort or disbelief.]

Let's apply this idea of different languages of love to our efforts to show love to our partners. One of the most important things we can ever do to strengthen any relationship is to communicate love. Yet, just as for you, your partners have different ways they like to be loved. What differences have you discovered in the way your partners like to be loved?

[Encourage discussion.]

There are several ways of discovering how your partner likes to be loved. We can ask ourselves:

What has worked to show love to my partner in the past?

The second way to discover your partner's love language is to notice how that person shows love.

The third way is to ask that person, "How do you like to be loved?"

[Provide a worksheet to each class member.]

Let's make a list of some of the things you have done that seem to effectively show love to your partner. Write down ways he or she may like to be given love through showing, telling or hugging. Think about specific incidents where you have effectively conveyed love to him or her. You may choose to write several things in one area or a few things in each area depending on what you think will be most effective at conveying your love to your partner.

[This is the heart of this session. Work with individuals to come up with ideas. Encourage sharing if it is helpful. See if every participant can think of an idea or two for each column. If all the ideas are in one column, that might be the partner's main language of love.]

What did you learn about your partners and how to be more effective in loving them?

[Encourage comments.]

Do you think you now know everything about your partner's love languages?

[No! Discovering and fine-tuning an understanding of each person's love languages takes a lifetime.]

Maybe you see some ways of showing love for your partner that you would like to try out. Look over your list and mark something that you would like to try in the week ahead.

[Pause a few seconds while participants make marks.]

How can you keep improving the way you show love to your partner?

[Answers might include: Pay attention to what works. Try new things. Talk with others. Ask your partner.]

If you customize your messages of love to match your partner's preferences, do you think it could strengthen your relationship?

[Yes! Encourage comments.]

There are two language of love that probably work with all people. One is taking time. Almost all people appreciate it when someone takes time to listen or be with them. The second is being understanding. When someone is in pain, they generally appreciate someone who will listen and try to understand how they feel.

It is good to find a way to show love that is effective for your partner and is something you are comfortable doing.

Put a star (*) or check (/) by those you plan to do more of in order to show love to your partner.

Recent research has shown that one of the best ways of strengthening a relationship is by providing 5 times as many positives as negatives. If, for example, you were negative with your partner 3 times in a day, it means that you should be positive, encouraging, or loving 15 times in order to maintain a strong relationship. Is it easy to be positive 5 times as often as negative?

[It can be very difficult!]

You can see why it is so important to be looking for positives and ignore some negatives.

Try to find better ways of showing love to your partner between now and our next meeting. We'll have time at the beginning of our next meeting to share what we have learned.

*Sending Messages of Love to Your Partner
in His or Her Own Language*
Exercise 3

	“Show me.”	“Tell me.”	“Touch me.”
Examples:	Help with household tasks. Run errands or help out with projects.	Saying, “I love you!” Saying, “I love to be with you.” Writing notes.	Hug. Massage back or muscles. Sit close together.
What has worked with your partner in the past?			
How does he or she show love?			
How does he or she ask to be loved?			

Taking time

Being understanding

After listing some of the ways your partner likes to be loved, put a star (*) or check (/) by those you plan to do more of in order to show love to your partner.

Notice how many times each day you show positives or negatives to your partner. What can you do to make sure you give your partner five positives for each negative?

Learning 4. Seeing your partner's world through his or her eyes

We often use the words “understand” and “understanding” quite carelessly. For example, when our partner expresses a strong feeling, we may say, “I understand. I know just how you feel.” Is that true? Can I truly know how my partner feels?

[No. Even if I understand the situation, I cannot understand all the reasons that the situation may be especially painful for my partner.]

It is very difficult to understand another person's experience and feelings. Often it is very hard to get out of our own thoughts and feelings. For example, imagine a person is rushing along the street. He hurries across the street and doesn't notice an oncoming car and is hit. As the person lies in the street groaning, is that a good time to give a lecture about being careful?

[No! We should simply help the person with his injuries.]

When people are hurting physically or emotionally, we should provide emotional first aid. This session will give you ideas how to do that.

Helpful understanding is not mind-reading or imposing our meanings on others' behavior. I'm talking about “walking in their moccasins.” It is much like Steve Covey's recommendation to “seek to understand . . . then to be understood.”

Covey tells the story (1997, p. 205) of his wife's unreasonable love for Frigidaire appliances. He could never understand it. Nor could he dissuade her. It was not until he was willing to let her explore her feelings about Frigidaire that they discovered the reason for her loyalty. As a young girl Sandra's father was a school teacher and operated an appliance store. During a time of economic difficulty, the Frigidaire company was willing to finance her father's inventory. That allowed him to stay in business. It made a big difference for her family.

When, instead of understanding, we use judgment and accusation, we increase the distance in our relationships. When you act in a certain way, I interpret your actions in a certain way and accuse you based on my interpretation. You react with hurt and counter-accusation. The cycle of misunderstanding and accusation feeds on itself.

If we want to truly understand, we will do a lot of listening with compassion. If either person is willing to set aside his or her own ideas about why a person does something and listen to what the partner is saying—and why it is important to the partner—amazing relationship progress can be made.

Consider whether each of the following effectively shows understanding by considering what effect it has when someone uses this approach with you.

Do you feel understood when your partner gives advice?

"What you need to do is...."

"If you would stop being such a baby you wouldn't have that trouble."

[Probably not.]

Do you feel understood when your partner talks about his or her own feelings and experiences instead of yours with words such as:

"I understand."

"Your pain isn't that bad. Mine is worse."

"Everybody suffers. What makes you so special?"

"Why don't you grow up?"

"Stop that. You're driving me crazy."

[No. These do not show understanding.]

When people feel bad, they feel that their pain is so bad that no one can really understand it. That's why a person who is hurting would probably rather have you say, "Your pain must be awful. I wish I could understand just how sad (or hurt or lonely) you feel." Sometimes the best way to show understanding is to admit that you can't understand just how bad a person feels.

The key to understanding is to discern what the other person is feeling. Consider the following and whether it would show understanding to you. In fact, in exercise 4, show how much each of the following would feel understanding to you if it were said to you when you had strong feelings. Then ask your partner if it would show understanding to him or her. When you have shared the things that each of you consider understanding, tell your partner about a time that he or she effectively shown you understanding.

[Help participants complete exercise 4. When they have finished, proceed with the following.]

As I describe each of the following, raise your hand if you feel that it would help you feel understood:

You're upset about something and your partner says:

"You feel strongly about this!"

[Show of hands. While all of these would generally be considered good ways of showing understanding, the task here is to help class members identify those that work for them. Proceed by asking them to raise their hands if the following would show understanding to them effectively.]

"You seem to feel very concerned (hurt, upset, confused)."

[Show of hands]

"I would like to understand how you are feeling. Will you tell me more?"

[Show of hands]

"Uh huh."

[Show of hands]

"I wish I could understand better how you feel."

[Show of hands]

"Ouch. I don't know if I can even guess how terrible you feel"

[Show of hands]

"Let me see if I understand. You feel like...? "

[Show of hands]

"It sounds like you feel lonely (confused, sad, etc.)."

[Show of hands]

There is a surprise in the business of showing understanding in families. Showing understanding is difficult in part because we think we know our partners. We think their suffering is due to bad decisions, weaknesses, or failings. So we do not respond to our loved ones with healthy compassion. We often feel compelled to correct our partners—which causes pain and mistrust. Yet, once a person feels understood and supported, that person is more likely to solve problems and feel close to you.

Can you think of situations where you might try to be more understanding and sympathetic in support of your partner?

The trouble with understanding is that most of us have a hard time getting there when we feel attacked. The best time to cultivate understanding is when you are both feeling peaceful. Set aside your assumptions and judgments. Invite your partner to help you understand what a certain thing means to him or her. If you feel yourself getting upset and inclined to judge, yell, argue, or lecture, call for a timeout: "I'd like to think about what you've said. I really want to understand. Let me think about what you have said and maybe we can re-visit this again later."

Continuing to argue when people are upset is not a good idea.

Understanding is very difficult. It takes time and patience. Between now and when we meet again, try to notice when your partner has strong feelings about something. Instead of giving advice or telling about your experiences, try using the tools we have talked about for showing understanding. I will be glad to have you share your experiences when we meet next time.

Exercise 4: Seeing Your Partner's World through His or Her Eyes

The key to understanding is to discern what the other person is feeling. Consider the following and whether it would show understanding to you. Then ask your partner if it would show understanding to him or her.

Acknowledge or identify your feeling.

"You feel strongly about this!"

"You seem to feel very concerned (hurt, upset, confused)."

Invite more discussion.

"I would like to understand how you are feeling. Will you tell me more?"

"Uh huh."

Understand that the person's pain is special for that person.

"I wish I could understand better how you feel."

"Ouch. I don't know if I can even guess how terrible you feel"

Use active listening.

"Let me see if I understand. You feel like...? "

"It sounds like you feel lonely (confused, sad, etc.)."

Ask your partner to describe a time that you effectively showed understanding to him or her.

Learning 5: Making creative use of our differences

Would some of you like to share experiences you had this week with trying to show understanding?

There are several things we know about how couples fight:

1. Virtually all couples fight sometimes.
2. Most fights follow a very predictable pattern: People do the same things they've always done and most people fight about the same way.
3. Fights are most likely when partners are tired or stressed.
4. We sometimes attack our partner even though that approach doesn't help us get what we want.
5. We can be more successful couples as we find ways to calm down when a fight begins.

Have you ever started a discussion late at night about something that bothered you? Have you found that the more you talked about it the madder you got?

[This is true of many people.]

What can you do to prevent this?

[Have discussions when you are rested and in a good mood.]

What have you found that helps you settle down when you start to get upset?

[Some couples can use humor. Some apologize. Some express appreciation. Some ask for a time out to calm down.]

The most unhelpful fights may be those where we let tiredness and irritation move us to attack our partner. Fights almost never help. But sometimes a calm discussion may help us solve problems and feel closer.

Exercise 5 lists steps for avoiding a fight and planning a helpful discussion. Think about a time that you have wanted to share a concern or frustration with your partner. Use this form to plan how you could make the discussion productive.

[Facilitate participants' completion of Exercise 5.]

If we follow sensible processes, we can turn our differences into a strength. We may never change our partner but the differences between us can become a blessing. How do you think that can happen?

[Discuss ideas.]

People who are very good at relationships learn to welcome input. Even when your partner is angry or unfair, a relationship master will listen to the partner's need and try to be understanding. This isn't easy to do. Do you have any ideas what can help you do this?

[Discuss ideas—such as don't get defensive, stay calm, think about what you want in the relationship, etc.]

In thinking about these differences, don't forget to keep the relationship positive. Don't let a pebble in your shoe cause you to cut your foot off.

One way that couples stay close is by talking together about subjects that evoke strong feelings---but aren't a complaint about each other. For example, at the end of the day the couple can take 15 minutes to talk about a problem with a co-worker or traffic. The partner who is listening doesn't need to offer solutions or recommendations. He or she can merely try to understand: "Sounds like a tough day!" "I don't know how you kept your temper." During these sharing times, neither partner should give advice unless asked. Since this time is intended to help you connect, pay close attention to your partner. Try to understand his or her point of view. Notice how he or she seems to feel. Take his or her side. Express your support and affection: "I can see why you are so frustrated. I would feel that way too." "It's a good thing we have each other."

No relationship should get so focused on the problems that the partners forget the strengths and qualities that brought them together. Make time to share many subjects you agree on.

Notice if you have a chance to make creative use of differences between now and our next session. We will have an opportunity to share when we meet again.

Exercise 5: Making creative use of our differences

<p>Things you can do to make creative use of your differences and problems:</p>	<p>Describe a situation where you have been irritated in the past:</p> <p>In the spaces below, design a discussion that might turn your differences into a strength:</p>
<p>Get calm: Don't discuss it when angry, tired, or frustrated. Wait until you feel peaceful.</p>	
<p>Think about your partner's point of view: He or she may have a very different view of the situation. Try to understand what it looks like to him or her. Ask.</p>	
<p>Make a positive approach: Rather than attack, find a positive approach. "I want your input on an idea I have."</p>	
<p>Be creative: Look for new ways together that might be good for both of you.</p>	
<p>Accept differences: Allow for some disagreement. Your partner will always see some things different from the way you do. Accept and enjoy that difference.</p>	
<p>Be patient: Over the years you will probably find better and better ways of managing your differences. Be patient. Take the long view.</p>	

Learning 6: Find your common purpose

Have some of you had interesting experiences this week making creative use of differences?

Many people think of love as a strong feeling of attraction. But that feeling comes and goes. When we are angry, tired, or lonely, we may feel less attracted to our partner. In fact most feelings come and go. If our commitment to our partner is based on a feeling, it won't be very strong at times.

In contrast, our commitment can be a decision we make to work together with another person both to strengthen each other and in a common cause. What are some causes or purposes that a couple might work on together?

[Raising good children. Serving the community. Caring for the environment. Serving their church. Etc.]

Some people call a statement of common purpose a mission statement. For example, one couple's mission statement is "to work together to serve people."

Blaine Fowers, a marriage therapist tells about a couple who couldn't seem to get along until they found real purpose in marketing Native American art together. What are the causes that the two of you share?

[Have participants write on Exercise 6 the purpose or mission they share with their partner. Discuss as appropriate.]

We work better together when we know and appreciate each other's strengths. What do you see as your partner's greatest strengths?

[Invite participants to write ideas on Exercise 6, #2. These may be talents such as music or talents such as compassion. There are many possibilities. Every one has a gift of some sort. Help participants think of strengths they see in their partners. The VIA Signature Strengths Survey can be taken at www.authenichappiness.org It identifies a person's main strengths. It is free but requires registration and involves responding to about 200 questions.]

What do you see as your greatest strengths?

[Have participants record their answers on Exercise 6, #3.]

How can each of you be growing and also supporting your partner's growth?

[Exercise 6, #4]

What are some traditions you could build to keep your family close?

[Discuss. Weekly date? Regular talk time? Joint projects? Others? Have class members record those they would like to try on Exercise 6, #5.]

There are many things that pull us away from our partnerships such as demands at work, tiredness, friends or family. One idea that is important in families is the idea of windows and walls. Within families, it is important to keep a window open between us. For people outside the relationship, it is important to have some walls. For example, if we are telling more about our lives and feelings to someone outside our relationship than we are to our spouse, then we probably need to open the window between us and our spouses and build a wall between us and others outside our marriage. Many of our most private feelings and experiences should only be shared with our spouse.

What rules can you establish to prevent yourselves from becoming pulled apart?

[Encourage participants to share ideas and record ideas in Exercise 6, #6.]

As you think of your relationship with your spouse, I hope you will think of it as a partnership. Sometimes it will be difficult, but if you work together, what are the results likely to be?

[Unity. Friendship. Companionship. Etc.]

We wish you every success in your relationship. We encourage you to continue to reflect on the ideas you have learned in our times together. We also encourage you to keep growing as a couple by reading a good book or learning from people who have loving marriages. On the bottom of Exercise 6 is a list of some excellent resources for strengthening your relationship.

Exercise 6: Finding the common purpose

1. How would you describe common purpose or mission you have in your partnership?
2. What are your partner's greatest strengths or talents and how are you helping him or her grow?
3. What are your greatest strengths or talents?
4. What are you doing to develop your talents and support your partner's development of talents?
5. What traditions do you have---or would you like to establish---to keep family members connected in loving ways?
6. What rules have you established to prevent outside people and activities from getting between you and your partner?

A Few Recommended Resources

Web articles (more than 60 of them!) on development, marriage, parenting and family life at www.arfamilies.org then click on "Family Life" (Also articles on resource management and nutrition.) Can be used for newsletters, classes, discussions, or self-study.

- *Authentic Happiness By Martin E. P. Seligman, 2002, New York: Simon & Schuster Superb book about the three levels of happiness.
- *Anger Kills: 17 Strategies for Controlling the Hostility that Can Harm Your Health By Redford and Virginia Williams, 1998, New York: HarperCollins. Excellent book on overcoming anger.
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work By John M. Gottman, 1999, New York: Crown. Excellent book with many measures and recommendations.
- *Reconcilable Differences By Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobson, 2000, New York: Guilford Press. Acceptance is important in maintaining a strong relationship.
- *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail and How You Can Make Yours Last By John Gottman, 1994, New York: Simon & Schuster. Describes three kinds of relationships and ways to make yours strong.
- Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness By Blaine J. Fowers, 2000, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Insightful book about the importance of values in sustaining marriage.
- The Intentional Family By William J. Doherty, 1997, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. Quality family life should not be left to chance.
- Take Back Your Marriage By William J. Doherty, 2001, New York: Guilford Press. Many good ideas for protecting your marriage from outside demands.
- The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage By Michele Weiner Davis, 2002, New York: Fireside Book. Divorce is often a poor solution to marriage problems.
- Not "Just Friends" By Shirley P. Glass and Jean Coppock Staeheli, 2003, New York: Free Press. Affairs can be prevented or overcome.

Great Books and Resources for Families

The list below points you to some of the best available books, videos, and web resources to help you in your family journey. The books are organized into four areas: Self, Marriage, Parenting, and Development.

Books

(* = highest recommendation)

Self

- *Authentic Happiness By Martin E. P. Seligman, 2002, New York: Simon & Schuster Superb book about the three levels of happiness.
- *Anger Kills: 17 Strategies for Controlling the Hostility that Can Harm Your Health By Redford and Virginia Williams, 1998, New York: HarperCollins. Excellent book on overcoming anger.
- Learned Optimism By Martin E. P. Seligman, 1991, New York: Alfred Knopf. Optimism may be a key to mental wellness.
- Finding Flow By Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, New York: Basic Books. Good if you want to understand optimal human functioning.
- What You Can Change and What You Can't By Martin E. P. Seligman, 1993, New York: Fawcett. Seligman summarizes what therapies and medications are effective for various disorders.
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People By Stephen R. Covey, 1989, New York: Simon & Schuster. Seven habits for greater personal and interpersonal effectiveness.
- Finding Your Own North Star By Martha Beck, 2002, New York: Crown Books. A fine book to help you in your journey to self-discovery and expression.

Marriage

- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work By John M. Gottman, 1999, New York: Crown. Excellent book with many measures and recommendations.
- *Reconcilable Differences By Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobson, 2000, New York: Guilford Press. Acceptance is important in maintaining a strong relationship.
- *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail and How You Can Make Yours Last By John Gottman, 1994, New York: Simon & Schuster. Describes three kinds of relationships and ways to make yours strong.
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Parenting

*Between Parent and Child By Haim Ginott; Updated by Alice Ginott and H. Wallace Goddard, 2003, New York: Three Rivers Press. The classic book on parenting and dealing with emotions.

*Between Parent and Teenager By Haim Ginott, 1969, New York: Macmillan. Classic book is out of print but available on the web & used bookstores.

*Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child By John Gottman, 1998, New York: Simon & Schuster. This book describes four ways of dealing with children's emotions.

*Principles of Parenting By H. Wallace Goddard, Available online at: <http://www.humsci.auburn.edu/parent/> Individual units can be purchased for 10 cents each by writing to Publications. ACES. Duncan Annex. AU, AL 36849-5623. Especially recommended: Taking Care of the Parent; Being Understanding; Sending Messages of Love; Enjoying Each Child as an Individual; Something Better than Punishment.

Raising Courageous Kids By Charles A. Smith, 2004, Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books. Full of ideas for cultivating practical heroism in children.

What Kids Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids By Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith, Pamela Espeland, 1998, Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing. Build developmental assets in order to assure children's future.

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, 1999, New York: William Morrow & Co. Practical ideas based on Ginott's classic work.

Development

*A Child is Born By Lennart Nilsson and Lars Hamberger, 2003, New York: Dell Publishing. Amazing photographs of in uterine development.

What's Happening to My Body? By Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras, 2000, Newmarket Press. Help children understand the changes they go through.

Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care By Benjamin Spock, 1997, New York: Pocket Books. Good book for basic care of young children.

For more information about books in these areas or for books in other areas, see The Authoritative Guide to Self-Help Resources in Mental Health By Norcross, Santrock, Campbell, Smith, Sommer, & Zuckerman, 2003, New York: Guilford.

Videos

“Guiding Children Successfully” is a series of 12 1-hour programs produced by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and AETN. Tapes can be purchased for \$25 per program (\$8 for educational institutions) from AETN. Go to <http://www.aetn.org/gcs/>

“I Am Your Child” is a set of 6 tapes with excellent information for caring for young children. Check at www.iamyourchild.org for ordering information. Inexpensive and excellent.

Web resources

Web articles (more than 60 of them!) on development, marriage, parenting and family life at www.arfamilies.org then click on “Family Life” (Also articles on resource management and nutrition.) Can be used for newsletters, classes, discussions, or self-study.

Additional family web resources from all over the country at the Children, Youth, and Family Education and Research Network (www.cyfernet.org).

A Marriage and Couples Education Model (M/CEM)

H. Wallace Goddard, Extension Family Life Specialist

Dimension	Practices
Commit	Make the relationship primary. Make couple time a priority. Set limits on intrusions. Build in rituals of connection.
Grow	Continue development of personal strengths. Support partner's use of signature strengths. Support partner's growth. Show respect for fundamental rights as a human.
Understand	Understand partner through his or her world view. Make allowances for continuing differences. Accept and value differences. Understand and appreciate partner's pressures and needs.
Nurture	Find and cultivate common interests and activities. Develop affectional synchrony with partner (languages of love). Affect balance: Give five positives for each negative. Supplement and balance rather than compete and criticize.
Solve	Stay calm in the face of differences. Be open to other views. Consider multiple courses of action. Accept some differences as a part of relationship. Allow time for changes.
Serve	Develop a couple mission Be involved in common purposes. Build relationship on values as well as feelings.