

Building a Strong Marriage

Ready!

- This unit could take from 15 to 60 minutes depending on how much you cover and the amount of discussion you draw out. For tips on encouraging good discussions, see “Drawing the Best out of Your Students” at www.arfamilies.org/family_life/educators.
- This unit is intended to help partners in a couple relationship have a stronger relationship and work better together.
- Read or review the seven units on marriage and couple relationships at www.arfamilies.org click on “Family Life” then “Living/Loving in Families” then scroll down to “Marriage and Couple Relationships.”
- Read through the teaching suggestions that follow and customize them to your personality, objectives, and the group you will be teaching. You may trim certain questions in order to fit your time slot. You may choose to make your own abbreviated outline to teach from or to highlight key points in this teaching guide.
- With some groups it may be useful to hand out copies of the web unit for them to study at home.

Grab!

- Take a copy of the worksheet for each participant.
- If you plan to evaluate the session, take a copy of the evaluation form for each participant.
- If you want to share them with participants, take a copy of the web units for each person. Alternately, you might invite participants to read the units online before coming to class.

Go!

Does anyone here own a car? (If many class members do not own a car, you could ask them how many have a body.) Does your car (body) have both good qualities and bad?

[Allow several people to share. Show interest and support for every answer. The group should quickly come to the conclusion that every car (body) has some parts that work well and some that work poorly]

If you think all the time about the parts that don’t work right, what happens? Do things get better?

[No! You get discouraged and depressed. You want to give up or buy a new car!]

Do you think that dwelling on the problems will help you fix them?

[Usually not, usually dwelling on problems gets us discouraged and hopeless. Instead of wanting to fix things, we just feel like giving up – selling the car or giving up on our body.]

What happens if you list and think about the good qualities of your car (body)?

[We feel encouraged and hopeful - satisfied.]

Some people would say that thinking about the good makes you more likely to get even better while dwelling on the bad makes you more likely to give up and get worse. What do you think?

[It seems likely. For example, when we feel that our car (body) is basically a good car (body), we are more likely to take care of it. If we feel that our car is all messed up, we may stop taking care of it.]

How does this apply to marriage? What happens if we dwell on the good and happens if we dwell on the bad?

[Welcome all answers. The group is likely to recognize that too much emphasis on the bad can make us discouraged. Emphasis on the good makes us more hopeful and more likely to take care of our relationship.]

What are some of the unhelpful things we do when we have problems in our marriage?

[There are many answers: We start to judge each other. We fight more. We blame and accuse. We show less kindness. We look for more reasons to be mad – like things that have happened in the past. Welcome all answers.]

Do these actions help the relationship get stronger?

No! They divide us and separate us.

What happens if we dwell on the good things in our relationship?

[Welcome all answers. We tend to feel more loving. We feel happier. We want to spend more time with our partner.]

If our automatic or natural ways of dwelling on problems, tends to make them worse, then we need to learn some better ways. Here are three principles for making a stronger relationship:

- 1. Remember the good**
- 2. Try to understand the good reasons for the things your partner does.**
- 3. Work together on things that you care about.**

[Provide a worksheet to each participant]

Using the worksheet, let's talk about each idea. You might jot down you own answers – or other ideas for improving your marriage – to each question as we discuss them.

[The lesson can expand substantially if you take time to discuss each question under each principle. In fact this lesson could easily expand into two sessions. This guide will just consider the main points.]

The first principle is to remember the good. What are some things you do to remember the good points of your relationship?

[Many ideas might be given. They might include keeping pictures in a wallet, displaying pictures and memorabilia in the home, keeping a list of partner's qualities, having a photo album, keeping a journal or scrapbook of cherished moments, etc.]

Remembering the good and staying focused on strengths is especially important when we are stressed or when the relationship has challenges. A solid foundation of remembered strengths provides a foundation for enlarging the relationship. The second principle is to try to understand even the irritating things our partner does. Every partner does things that bother us. It is easy to start to think that our partner is selfish or mean. It is more helpful to try to understand the good reasons for our partner's actions. Can any of you give examples of something our partner does that is well intentioned even if it bothers us?

[Welcome all examples. For example, a partner may nag because she likes tidiness or a partner may leave things lying around because he is easy-going or a partner may come home late because he or she gets involved in a task. Help participants understand that people generally do the things they do for reasons that make sense to them.]

This is a really important point: People do what they do for reasons that make sense to them. We may not understand the reasons. But we can try to understand them. When we understand, we can work together to find better ways of working together. The third principle is to work together on things that your care about. Common causes help people be connected. What are some of the projects that you share with your partner?

[Welcome all answers: Raising good children; Making the community a better place; Worship; Starting a business, etc.]

If we apply these three principles in our relationships, we are more likely to have a satisfying and long-lasting relationship. I encourage you to talk with your partner about the ideas we have discussed today. Your partner may have very different suggestions. Listen to them. Welcome them. I wish you much happiness.

[For further study, participants can also be given copies of the web units or the web address.]

Original work by H. Wallace Goddard

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Our automatic or natural ways of dwelling on problems, tends to make them worse. We need to learn better ways. Here are three principles for making a stronger relationship:

1. Remember the good.
 - What are the things that first impressed you about your partner?

 - What have been the great moments in your relationship?

 - What are the good things your partner does now?

 - What can you do to help yourself remember those good things about your partner?

2. Try to understand the good reasons for the things your partner does.
 - Even though some things your partner does may be irritating, what are the GOOD reasons your partner does them? (For example, your partner may nag you about being careful because he or she worries about you and your safety.)

3. Work together on things that you care about.
 - What projects have you done together that brought satisfaction to you?

 - What is a common purpose or project that both of you care about? (It could be buying a house, raising good kids, serving God, or building a business, etc.)

 - What project are you both interested in that could be a source of satisfaction?

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Please answer the following question in order to help us know whether this session was helpful to you.

1. This workshop gave me specific ideas that will be helpful to me.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

2. I think this session will help me be a better family member.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

3. I am glad I attended this workshop.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

Comments or suggestions: