

# Section 4

## Relationship Enrichment Skills: Couples Session to Learn and Practice New Ways of Communicating and Problem Solving

**T**he Relationship Enrichment Skills workshop is designed to provide couples who are parenting together the opportunity to learn and practice key communication skills with the help of experienced leader couples. During this 3-hour workshop parents will learn a four-step model for resolving conflict, new ways to handle anger, and the importance of growth together as a couple. In addition, parents will have an opportunity to discuss and set goals for their relationship.

The Relationship Enrichment Skills intervention consists of one 3-hour session. Due to the nature of the curriculum and topics covered, it is typically necessary to implement this workshop in one setting as written. This intervention is designed specifically for parents who are currently in a relationship with one another and share the same household. The Relationship Enrichment Skills workshop is intended to be implemented with individual couples rather than in a group setting. This format allows a mother and father to work one-on-one with a leader couple to build their communication and problem-solving skills.

### **Choosing a Facilitator**

The Relationship Enrichment Skills intervention is facilitated by trained leader couples and was intended to be facilitated by faith-based volunteers. Couples selected as facilitators should exhibit excellent communication skills and the ability to effectively coach couple interactions. It is highly recommended that at least one member of each leader couple have extensive training in education, counseling, psychology or a related field.

### **Implementation Tips**

- Meet with local Ministerial Alliances to discuss ways to identify potential Leader Couples.
- Approach local colleges and universities to discuss ways to identify graduate student couples who may be interested in serving as Leader Couples.

### **Resources/Tools**

The tools listed below are shown on the following pages and included on the CD attached to the inside front cover of the Fathers for Life Technical Assistance Manual.

- Post Session Evaluation



# **RELATIONSHIP ENRICHMENT SKILLS TRAINING**

## **Leader Guide and Outline**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

This training curriculum has been developed with several goals in mind. First, it will provide an opportunity for a couple who are parents together to learn and practice key communication skills with the help of an experienced leader couple. The leader couple will both model the skills and also provide coaching during the parents' practice opportunities.

Parents will learn new ways to handle anger and a four-step model for resolving conflicts gently and respectfully. Parents will also learn the importance of growth together as a couple, and have an opportunity to discuss and set goals for their relationship.

Some of the handout materials used with this curriculum have been developed by the authors, Cheryl Leeds and Bob Hellrung, and some have been developed by the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.). The curriculum is solely the responsibility of the authors, and was developed for The Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project ("Fathers for Life"), funded by the Missouri Division of Child Support Enforcement.

Initially, this training is being conducted by leader couples who have been trained and certified by A.C.M.E. It is contemplated that any couple conducting the training will, at a minimum, be thoroughly familiar with the communication principles involved and have experience coaching others in the use of the skills.

### **B. INTRODUCTION**

#### **Concerns and Confidentiality (:01)**

Any concerns should be expressed – especially physical or emotional discomfort. Leaders will not repeat anything said by a parent without permission.

Exceptions required by law: a threat of violence or unreported abuse or neglect of a child.

#### **Introductions (:03)**

Relationship history of leaders

How long together; when married, children, other relevant history

Relationship history of parents

Children

How long together? Married? If so, when?

How long separated?

How frequent has been their communication? Lately?

How soon might they be together again?

Establishing the confidential context of the training at the outset allows the parents to more comfortably share their relationship history and also participate more openly and vulnerably in the exercises and skill practices throughout the training. The exceptions regarding threats and child abuse and neglect give appropriate notice to the parents that leaders may be required by law to report those things. Whether the leaders are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect will usually be known by them and will depend primarily on their profession of origin. More information regarding requirements in Missouri can be obtained by calling the child abuse hotline number at 1-800-392-3738.

Leaders briefly share their own history before asking the parents for theirs.

## **C. MOTIVATION**

### **Why learn relationship skills? (:03)**

We weren't taught these skills growing up or in school.

These skills are useful in relating to each other.

Skills promote:

- Better communication

- More understanding of each other

- Safety for growth in closeness together

- More emotional security for the children and provide a better example

- Skills learned also helpful on jobs, etc.

Leaders establish that key relationship skills involving communication and conflict resolution are not normally learned unless people go out of their way to learn them. Leaders can share how late in life they themselves learned these skills and that they continue to learn to better use them as their relationship continues to grow. Leaders can affirm that these skills have made a positive difference in their own relationship.

## **D. CONTENT OF TRAINING**

### **Review of content of training: (:04)** (mention restroom BREAK at midpoint)

All participation is voluntary but you learn best by participating

The importance of feelings

- Key to knowing each other and ourselves

- Skills to help us safely express feelings

- EXERCISE: From the Heart

Communicating gently and respectfully

- Using "I" statements and PRACTICE

- Reflective listening and PRACTICE

- Dialogue process and DIALOGUES

New ways to handle anger

- Three-step process and EXERCISE and DIALOGUE

Solving problems together gently and respectfully

- Four-step S.A.V.E. Process

Intimacy and time alone together  
Appreciation and EXERCISE for later  
Growing together  
Resources  
Goals and EXERCISE

Leaders review the content of the training, including the scheduled break at the midpoint. Starting with the voluntary nature of participation allows parents to feel more comfortable hearing about exercises and skill practicing they will be asked to do. Knowing that they are unlikely to learn the skills effectively without participating will help motivate parents to overcome their natural self-consciousness about learning something new in front of each other and the leaders. Leaders should also explain that they will be modeling the skills before asking parents to practice them

Learning the scope of the training allows parents to see the elements in context. Questions about a specific element are best deferred until that element is reached unless the question appears to reflect a concern, in which case it should be addressed.

## **E. EMOTIONAL INTIMACY**

### **The importance of knowing each other's feelings (:04)**

Key to knowing each other (and ourselves)  
Feelings connect us and create closeness  
Awareness allows us to know when to support or comfort each other  
Feelings are facts – to be respected, not minimized or contradicted  
Men and women are conditioned differently but change is possible and healthy  
Expressing feelings with kindness is important  
Skills help us safely express feelings  
EXERCISE: From the Heart – HANDOUT (:10)

Leaders review why knowing each other's feelings is so important in an intimate relationship.

When stating that awareness of each other's feelings allows us to know when to provide support or comfort, leaders can affirm that these are things loving people do for each other.

Leaders can point out that there is a natural tendency to minimize feelings in others that make us uncomfortable or defensive, and also that this can create frustration and hurt in a loved one who doesn't feel heard.

Leaders can also point out that boys and young men are conditioned to keep their feelings (other than anger) to themselves or be considered weak. Also that such behavior contributes to heart and other health problems for men, as well as distance from loved ones. Most men wish their own fathers had been more open with their feelings. Many men are becoming more emotionally open and improving their relationships as a result.

An observation that applies more to women can follow the one above in order to provide a balance. Feelings can be used as a weapon if expressed harshly. Ideally,

negative feelings will be accompanied by positive ones that reaffirm our love and the importance of the relationship. Leaders can mention that some women develop a practice of expressing feelings harshly in certain relationships because they believe they need to be forceful to get their message across. This often produces defensiveness rather than the desired result. Leaders can affirm that the more we learn to listen to each other's feelings carefully and respectfully, the more we realize that we can express them more effectively in a gentle manner.

Learning to avoid creating defensiveness with our statements and learning to listen to each other carefully and respectfully helps make it safer for us to express our feelings.

**EXERCISE:** Leaders will hand each parent a copy of the sheet headed From the Heart and explain that this is an opportunity to learn feelings of each other that are often not shared but that are important for couples to know about each other. This exercise encourages parents' willingness to ask each other about their feelings and also to be open about expressing a wide variety of their own feelings. Leaders model the exercise first by taking turns asking each other a question and responding. Each question and response should ideally take no longer than one minute, in order to allow enough time for parents to take turns asking questions of the other parent. Leaders listen to the parents' questions and responses, and may intervene regarding timing so that a lengthy response doesn't limit the chance for other questions to be asked. No coaching is contemplated during this exercise. Leaders may choose to refer back to a parent's response in this exercise in suggesting statements to be used while practicing "I" statements or reflective listening.

## **F. COMMUNICATING GENTLY AND RESPECTFULLY**

### **Using "I" statements**

A.C.M.E. booklet, Creative Communication – HANDOUT (:03)

Leaders model "You" + "I" statements – "You" + "I" Statements HANDOUT (:03)

Parents PRACTICE, leaders coach – Other "You" Statements (on flip side) (:10)

Questions? (:02)

Other "You" + "I" Statement Examples – HANDOUT

Leaders give each parent a copy of the Creative Communication booklet and ask them to follow along in the booklet as the leaders review the contents by reading the bold-faced headlines on each page. This helps parents learn the scope of the information in the booklet and hopefully encourages them to later read more than the sections that will be discussed in the training. Leaders then return to the section on "I" statements and "You" statements on pages three and four. This text can be read or paraphrased by the leaders as they review the points. Ensuring that parents are aware of the specific text allows them to refer back to it more reliably in future discussions about their communication.

Leaders give each parent the sheet headed "You" + "I" Statements, and review the points above the examples. Leaders then take turns saying "You" statements to each other, either from their own relationship history or from the examples on the page.

After each "You" statement, the speaker can ask, "How do you feel after hearing that statement?" The other leader can reply, "Not very good." The speaker can then say the corresponding "I" statement and ask how the other leader feels. The other leader can reply, "Better." Other responses could include, "Accused" vs. "Asked for help."

It should be pointed out that this skill takes practice to learn, and that feedback from experienced leaders while learning can be very helpful. Note also that learning this skill is a long-term process, and that review of the handout materials and regular practice in the future can noticeably improve their skills in this area.

Leaders refer parents to the Other "You" Statements on the flip side of "You" + "I" Statements, and ask the parents to take turns converting a "You" statement to an "I" statement. Note that the first step is to identify the feelings to be expressed. The goal is gentle and respectful communication of feelings in a way that avoids creating defensiveness in each other and invites help in solving a problem. Parents can be asked to start with the first example, which the leaders can note if obviously not applicable to their current situation: "You never call when you're going to be late coming home."

Other "You" statements to be converted to "I" statements can include:

- "You're always correcting me in front of other people."
- "You go through money like it's water."
- "You're always making decisions without talking with me about them."
- "You're always criticizing the children. They can't seem to do anything right."

Parents can also be asked for examples from their relationship history of any "You" statement generalizations that have accused or blamed the other parent, and then can be asked to come up with appropriate "I" statements. If there were any responses by a parent during the From the Heart exercise that seem appropriate in creating a "You" statement, leaders can also make that suggestion.

### **Using "I" statements (continued)**

Leaders can note that the blank space between the "You" statements on the handout can be used by the parents as a place to note feelings that correspond with each statement, if the parents would find that helpful. Parents should be asked to take turns converting "You" statements to "I" statements, and leaders can either suggest that parents follow the statements in the order they are listed on the page or ask the parents to choose from among the remaining statements when it is their turn.

Examples of ways to convert the five "You" statements on the "You" Statement handout to "I" statements are included on the handout, Other "You" + "I" Statement Examples, which the leaders will give to the parents at the end of this section.

Leaders can note the importance of learning to give each other gentle feedback when parents are on the receiving end of "You" statements from each other. An

example of a possible response can be, "I'm feeling a little blamed by that comment. How about converting that to an "I" statement for me? That will improve my response." Also, a "You" statement can be reflected in its "I" statement form (see last sentence of this page).

Some thoughts on coaching: It may be preferable for the male leader to coach Dad and for the female leader to coach Mom, although that is probably less important at this stage than during the dialogue stage later. It's best to avoid even a hint of criticism. Find something to praise as often as possible. Especially praise clear feeling statements that are non-blameful. Ask a speaker how a statement could more clearly state a feeling. Ask how a speaker could eliminate any trace of accusation or blame.

Leaders give each parent a copy of the Other "You" + "I" Statement Examples handout and review the "I" statements as examples for their future reference. Leaders can refer to the first of these "I" statements and point out that acknowledging an understanding of the other parent's situation ("I know it's not always easy . . .") can help reduce the listener's defensiveness and therefore allow more empathy for the speaker's feelings. Leaders close this section by asking if parents have any questions about "I" statements.

## **Reflective listening**

Effective Communication in a Conflict Situation – HANDOUT (:03)

Leaders model reflective listening and add comments (:04)

Parents PRACTICE reflective listening; leaders coach (:10)

Questions? (:02)

Leaders give each parent the sheet headed Effective Communication in a Conflict Situation and review the "Two Key Guidelines." Then note that the points under "Some Ways to Avoid Getting a Person's Defenses Up" are connected to the use of "I" statements. The first point about turning criticism into a request gives the example of "I would like it

if . . ." and leaders can note that the Other "You" + "I" Statement Examples use that same language to invite help in solving the problem being mentioned.

After the first point, skip down to the section on "Listening Well to Let the Other Person Know That You Fully Understand." Read or paraphrase those points, emphasizing the importance of listening for each other's feelings, including those implied but not stated.

Leaders then model reflective listening, preferably using statements from their own relationship history. Using the first example from the "You" + "I" Statements handout, leaders can note that a "You" statement can be reflected in its "I" statement form. "You're not helping me enough" can be reflected as, "You'd appreciate it if I would help you more."

## **Reflective listening (continued)**

Leaders should acknowledge that reflective listening is not normal conversational behavior and can feel awkward, especially in the early stages of learning the skill. It is



most useful in a situation where people want to discuss feelings about a certain issue or problem in a way that is designed to promote clear and effective communication – as in the dialogue process which will be discussed soon. Leaders can affirm that reflective listening is a key skill that helps us feel truly heard and understood by each other. Feeling understood is an important part of feeling accepted and loved by each other.

Leaders can point out that effective listening requires us to quiet our impulse to be thinking about our responses instead of listening carefully to each other. It also requires us to resist our desire to offer suggestions or advice, and to just focus on fully understanding our partner's feelings and point of view.

Parents are then asked to practice reflective listening, with leaders providing coaching help. Leaders should point out that each speaker is the best authority on his or her own feelings and whether or not they have been accurately reflected. Note also that responses should only be reflective and should not include questions or evaluative comments.

Parents will take turns making a statement, preferably in one sentence, about some or all of the following topics (as time permits), which the listener will be asked to reflect:

- "Something I really appreciate about you."
- "Something that has made me happy."
- "Something I'm proud of regarding my child (or one of my children)."
- "Something I look forward to."
- "Something I'd like to accomplish."

Some thoughts on coaching: Praise reflective statements that clearly identify feelings. Where appropriate, ask the listener if there are any possible feelings that were missed in their reflective response. Ask the listener if there is any more content in the speaker's statement that could be reflected. Ask the speaker if he or she believes that the listener has heard and understood the speaker's point of view.

Leaders close this section by asking if parents have any questions about reflective listening.

### **Switching between speaker and listener modes (:02)**

Leaders explain that in the dialogue process, one party is the speaker and the other is the listener until they agree to switch roles. This ensures that the speaker is not interrupted before the speaker feels that his or her point is truly heard and understood by the listener. When the speaker is ready to become the listener, the speaker can say, "I'm ready to switch." If the listener wants to become the speaker before the speaker is ready to switch, the listener can ask, "Can we switch?" At that point, the speaker can decide whether he or she is at a good stopping place and feels sufficiently heard and understood for the moment, or whether more time as speaker is needed before

switching. Leaders should point out that speaker and listener roles can switch many times in a dialogue.

### **Dialogue process – Part I**

Dialogue includes "I" statements, reflective listening and switching (:01)

Why use the dialogue process? (:01)

Leaders model a dialogue about a concern related to their relationship (:07)

Parents DIALOGUE using a non-relationship concern; leaders coach (:15)

Questions? (:02)

Leaders explain that the dialogue process includes expressing feelings, preferably as "I" statements, plus reflective listening and switching roles as speaker and listener until each person feels understood by the other.

Leaders describe the advantages of using the dialogue process, including the fact that the structure promotes understanding of and respect for each other's point of view. A major benefit is the likelihood of feeling truly heard and understood during a potentially difficult conversation. The measured pace of the process makes it unlikely that a heated argument will develop, which makes it safer for people to express their feelings openly. A dialogue can be requested whenever one person believes that his or her concerns are not being heard or understood by another, or when previous conversations about the topic to be discussed have been unproductive or argumentative.

Leaders model a dialogue about a concern related to their relationship. Due to time limits, it is preferable to keep statements relatively short to allow a number of statements and reflective responses. It may not be possible to switch in such a short dialogue, but ideally the leader who is the speaker will at least complete his or her points and be able to acknowledge feeling heard and understood.

Parents are asked to dialogue, using a concern that is not related to their relationship. Examples could include: a parent's concern about the health or other issue relating to that parent's own parent; job concerns of a parent; or an issue relating to a friend, a neighbor or a relative not part of their immediate family.

Some thoughts on coaching: Leaders may want to position their chairs next to each parent (male beside male and female beside female) as parents dialogue with each other. This enables leaders to make coaching suggestions more individually and less intrusively. Ideally, coaching can be minimized at this stage in order to allow the dialogue to flow and develop naturally. However, at a minimum, "You" statements should be coached into "I" statements and responses should be coached to reflect obvious feelings. Parents can be asked if they feel heard and understood. Ideally, parents should switch about midway.

Leaders close by asking if parents have any questions about the dialogue process.

**[BREAK: (:10) (at 90 minutes from start)]**

## **Dialogue Process – Part II**

Parents and leaders complete written EXERCISE about communication (:05)  
Share exercise results with partners (:05)  
Leaders model dialogue about their communication (:07)  
Parents DIALOGUE about their communication; leaders coach (:15)  
Questions? (:02)

Leaders hand each parent a copy of the sheet headed Two Things About Our Communication and pens to write with if needed. Leaders note that parents have five minutes to complete the written exercise and another five minutes to share the results with each other. Note also that the exercise will provide material for the parents' next dialogue.

## **Dialogue Process – Part II (continued)**

Leaders complete the same exercise while the parents are completing theirs, and leaders share their results with each other while the parents are doing the same thing. Then leaders model a dialogue about an aspect of their own communication that came up in their exercise. The leader who was initially the listener in their previous dialogue should start as speaker for this one.

Parents are then asked to dialogue about one or more aspects of their communication that came up in their exercise. The parent who started as the listener in their previous dialogue should start as speaker in this one, and then switch about midway.

Some thoughts on coaching: Because this subject matter is more personal, special attention should be paid to the quality of "I" statements being used, especially to look for any traces of blame or accusation. Leaders should also be sure that obvious feelings are reflected in responses.

Leaders ask again if parents have any questions about the dialogue process.

## **G. NEW WAYS TO HANDLE ANGER (:08)**

A.C.M.E. booklet, Creative Use of Conflict

Anger is a natural response

Expressing underlying feelings creates less defensiveness + more empathy

Three-step process for handling anger

Time outs

Men and women are conditioned differently about expressing anger

EXERCISE: When I Am Angry (:05)

Parents DIALOGUE about their exercise responses; leaders coach (:15)

Leaders give each parent a copy of Creative Use of Conflict and ask them to follow along in the booklet as the leaders review the contents by reading the bold-faced headlines on each page. Leaders return to the section on "The Role of Anger in Conflict" on page three and read or paraphrase the points through the middle of page eight.

In reviewing "Step 1. Do Not Attack" on page five of the booklet, leaders can mention the agreement of David and Vera Mace to "stop spitting at each other." They believed that attacking each other in anger was the psychological equivalent of spitting. Leaders can mention David and Vera's role in founding A.C.M.E., and also David Mace's book, Love and Anger in Marriage, which is cited in the back of the booklet as a recommended reading. The book is available in the prison library and leaders should also point out that it is available from A.C.M.E. at the 800 # in the back of the booklet.

In reviewing "Step 3. Look Behind the Anger" on page six of the booklet, leaders can emphasize that expressing our more vulnerable feelings along with our anger helps create empathy rather than defensiveness in the other person.

When reviewing "time out" on page seven, leaders can note that it is helpful if time outs have an agreed-upon duration – ideally no less than twenty minutes and no more than an hour – so that neither partner feels like the discussion has been abandoned or that his or her feelings are being ignored.

When reviewing "new patterns" on page eight, leaders can point out that many men and women have been conditioned differently in childhood about expressing anger. As a result, some might say anger is the one emotion men are allowed to express and the one emotion women aren't allowed to express. Both will benefit from these new behaviors.

### **New ways to handle anger (continued)**

Leaders hand each parent a copy of When I Am Angry, and ask them to complete the exercise in writing. Leaders will note that parents have five minutes to complete the exercise and 15 minutes to dialogue with each other about a part of the exercise. When parents have completed the exercise, leaders ask them to dialogue about the last two questions in the exercise: "How do I act when I am angry with you?" and "How do I hope to act in the future when I am angry with you?" The parent who started the previous dialogue as the listener should start as the speaker, and then switch about midway.

Some thoughts on coaching: Leaders should listen carefully for "You" statements that may be prompted by this topic, and can point out how "I" statements allow parents to take responsibility for their anger, which is usually a more effective way to communicate because the other parent will be more likely to want to work together to resolve the issue.

### **H. RESOLVING CONFLICT GENTLY AND RESPECTFULLY (:05)**

Beyond right/wrong to right/right by respecting other's point of view

S.A.V.E. Process HANDOUT

Questions? (:02)

Leaders can point out how easy it is for couples to get into contests of who is right and who is wrong when they disagree. Leaders can also note that in most cases both partners are "right" from their own point of view, and that by getting a full understanding of each other's point of view they can avoid most right/wrong arguments.

Leaders hand each parent a copy of The S.A.V.E. Process for Gentle, Respectful Conflict Resolution and review with them the points on the page. Leaders can point out that it may take a number of S.A.V.E. discussions to become convinced that each person shares responsibility for any problem between them, but in the meantime they should assume that's the case. Leaders can note the importance of seeing each other's point of view as valid from the other's perspective, and that our ability to put ourselves in each other's shoes is likely to improve with practice.

Leaders ask if parents have any questions about the S.A.V.E. Process.

## **I. INTIMACY AND TIME ALONE TOGETHER (:04)**

A.C.M.E. booklet, Creating Intimacy – HANDOUT

One of the best gifts partners can give each other is time and attention

Expressing appreciation

For the little things as well as for what we add to each other's lives

HANDOUT for later: write each other: Three things I appreciate about you.

Leaders give each parent a copy of the Creating Intimacy booklet and ask them to follow along in the booklet as the leaders review the contents by reading the bold-faced headlines on each page. Leaders can point out that regularly spending time alone together allows us to connect on a feeling level. It can also be time that allows us to share something fun as a couple. Leaders can also point out that there are many opportunities each day to say thanks to each other for something, including meals prepared, errands run, sharing chores, driving children places, etc. The more we feel appreciated for what we do and who we are, the more we feel like doing nice things for each other. It also helps us feel appreciated if we occasionally hear how much we add to each other's lives.

Leaders give parents Three Things I Appreciate About You to be completed later.

## **J. GROWING TOGETHER (:04)**

Resources – HANDOUT

Learning together

Reading together or to each other

Marriage Magazine

Enrichment resources

A.C.M.E. – Newsletter and chapter activities

Marriage Encounter – The Inmates Marriage Encounter by Mail

If you need help

Publications on Resources list

Counseling – trained marriage and family therapists

Setting and aiming at goals

Expecting to fall short and celebrating our progress

Reviewing, revising and recommitting regularly

EXERCISE: 3 Things I Want For Our Relationship (:10)

Leaders give each parent a copy of the Resources handout, and mention that the publications are in the prison library, including a number of books for couples on communication, conflict resolution and enhancing intimacy. Leaders can also mention that A.C.M.E. (800 # in booklets) is a non-sectarian international organization about 30 years old with members in every state and many foreign countries. A number of local chapters have educational programs and there are also regional and national marriage enrichment conferences which couples can attend. Some activities are open only to married couples, such as Marriage Enrichment Groups, which usually meet every month.

Also mention that there are a number of Marriage Encounter groups, each with a religious affiliation. Note that The Inmates Marriage Encounter by Mail is in the prison library. Contact information for Marriage Encounter is on the Resources handout.

Leaders can mention that many couples could use some help from a therapist at times in their relationship, and that the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (# on Resources handout) can provide names of local certified marriage and family therapists. Leaders can also mention that there are books which were written for couples who are experiencing serious relationship trouble, including Divorce Busting.

Leaders can discuss the importance of regularly setting and reviewing relationship goals. Examples include more relaxed time together, gentler and more respectful conflict resolution, more reading together, etc. Leaders can point out that missed goals are to be expected and shouldn't discourage us. The important thing is to regularly review and recommit to the goals that we continue to want to reach.

Leaders give each parent a copy of 3 Things I Want For Our Relationship and ask them to complete the exercise in writing. Parents will have five minutes to complete the exercise and five minutes to share the results with each other.

#### **K. CLOSING (:03)**

Parents are asked to thank each other for their participation in this training.

Leaders thank the parents and each other

Leaders ask permission to quote parents anonymously for educational purposes.

#### **L. EVALUATION (:05)**

Leaders ask parents to complete evaluations and to seal them in an envelope.

[TOTAL TIME = 3 hours and 15 minutes, including the 10 minute break and the evaluation]

## FROM THE HEART

Happy	Sad/Disappointed
Hopeful	Discouraged
Appreciated/Valued	Unappreciated
Loved	Hurt/Rejected
Loving	Angry/Resentful
Relieved/Safe	Concerned/Afraid
Grateful	Frustrated/Controlled
Proud	Embarrassed/Sorry

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1. When did you recently feel \_\_\_\_\_? (insert from above)

or

2. When was the last time you felt \_\_\_\_\_? (insert from above)

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A suggested daily practice:

1. What was the nicest (and worst) thing that happened to you today?

and then:

2. How did you feel?

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## “YOU” + “I” STATEMENTS

A “You” statement criticizes and blames someone for something they did or didn’t do. The other person usually gets defensive and the conversation often ends in an argument.

An “I” statement tells someone how you are feeling about something they did or didn’t do without criticizing them. It describes the other person’s actions in a factual and non-blameful way. This allows them to focus on your feeling rather than their own feeling of being blamed. The conversation has a better chance of leading to an agreeable result.

It sometimes helps to assume that the other person doesn’t know how you are feeling about the matter, even if you think they should. Often they are not as aware of your feelings as you think they are. Assume that they will want to know your feelings and will either change their behavior or be willing to discuss it. Also, if you have agreed about a change, don’t hesitate to raise the same matter again in a non-blameful way. It is often helpful to have reminders when you are trying to change something you do.

You are not helping me.

*I’d appreciate some help with this. How would you feel about doing . . . ?*

You never listen to me.

*I feel a little hurt when I think you don’t want to listen to me or that what I have to say isn’t important to you. I’d like it if you’d let me know that you heard me when I say something to you. I’d also like to know what you think or feel about it.*

You don’t appreciate what I do for you.

*I sometimes feel unappreciated when I haven’t heard any positive feedback from you in a while about the things I do for you. I’d like it if you’d let me know more often that you appreciate what I do. I’ll try to be better also about doing the same.*

You’re always yelling at me.

*I’d like us to talk without raising our voices when we disagree. Otherwise I feel attacked and hurt and I respond with anger.*

Stop telling me what to do.

*When you tell me to do something rather than ask me, I feel ordered around and I get angry. I’d like it if you would ask me when you want me to do something.*



## OTHER "YOU" STATEMENTS

### **Converting "You" statements to "I" statements:**

- 1. Identify the feelings to be communicated (look behind any anger for the underlying feelings that are more vulnerable, such as hurt or fear);**
- 2. Express the feelings in a gentle and respectful way that avoids creating defensiveness in each other (speak about your own experiences and avoid blame); and**
- 3. Invite help in solving the problem (I'd like it if . . .).**

"You never call when you're going to be late coming home."

"You're always correcting me in front of other people."

"You go through money like it's water."

"You're always making decisions without talking with me about them."

"You're always criticizing the children. They can't seem to do anything right,"



## OTHER "YOU" + "I" STATEMENT EXAMPLES

***Remember that the goal is the gentle and respectful expression of feelings in a way that avoids creating defensiveness in each other and invites help in solving a problem. Assume that your partner cares about your feelings.***

"You never call when you're going to be late coming home."

*"I feel worried and sometimes a little ignored when I don't hear from you when you're late coming home. I know it's not always easy to call, but it would really be helpful for me if you could. It would probably also help improve the mood I'm in when you finally arrive."*

"You're always correcting me in front of other people."

*"I feel embarrassed and a little put down when I am corrected in front of others. I'd like it if we could talk about some ways that you and I can disagree about something in front of others that would satisfy both of us."*

"You go through money like it's water."

*"I worry that we're not saving anything for emergencies or for our future needs. I'd like it if we could talk about how we're spending our money and see if we can come up with ways to help me feel a little more secure."*

"You're always making decisions without talking with me about them."

*"I feel left out and not very respected when I hear about decisions you've made without me that affect me. I know that some decisions need to be made on the spot, but I'd like it if we could talk about ways that we could make certain decisions together."*

"You're always criticizing the children. They can't seem to do anything right,"

*"I worry that our children may feel that you're completely dissatisfied with them due to your criticism of them. I'd like it if we could talk about ways that you could let them know more of your positive feelings about them."*



## Effective Communication in a Conflict Situation How to Get More of What You Want

### **Two Key Guidelines for Effective Communication in a Conflict Situation:**

1. Avoid statements that normally get a person's defenses up.
2. Listen well so you can let the other person know that you fully understand his or her goals and concerns.

### **Some Ways to Avoid Getting a Person's Defenses Up:**

1. Turn criticism into a request: "I would like it if . . ."
2. Look beneath your anger and talk about the underlying feelings – often hurt or fear – which are less likely to cause someone to feel attacked.
3. Speak about your own experiences rather than what the other person did or didn't do: "I was worried" instead of "You didn't call."
4. Avoid blame or fault (unless the seriousness of the situation makes accountability crucial, as in the case of previous violence, other abuse or neglect\*\*): "My point is not to blame, but just to have you understand how I was feeling."
5. Avoid name-calling, sarcasm, put-downs, foul language, and intimidating or threatening remarks.
6. Let each other know that you can understand their point of view: "I can understand why you would feel that way." Keep in mind that each person's point of view is based on his or her own experiences and circumstances. You can respect someone's point of view even if your point of view is different.
7. Describe your own point of view as, "This is the way I see it" rather than "This is the way it is."

### **Listening Well to Let the Other Person Know That You Fully Understand:**

1. Hear each other out without interrupting.
2. Put yourself in the other person's shoes as much as you can.
3. Let the other person know that you fully understand their concerns:
  - a. Repeat the concerns fully and accurately, but put them in your own words as much as possible to let the other person know that you really got it: "You're worried that you can't count on me to keep my word about this, and what that might mean about Michael's safety."

- b. Make sure you acknowledge any feelings you heard the other person mention, and also any feelings that were obvious from his or her statement but weren't directly stated: "Your fear is . . ."
- c. Don't hesitate to ask if you stated the concerns correctly. Only the other person knows what they really meant: "Is that it?" or "Did I get that?"

\*\* [If violence, other abuse or neglect is present, persons should seek appropriate help.]



## Two Things About Our Communication

Two Things I Like About Our Communication:

Two Things I Would Like to Change About Our Communication:

Two Things I'm Willing to Do to Change Our Communication:



**When I Am Angry**  
(“Behind Our Anger”)

WHEN: In what kinds of situations do I experience anger at you?

FEELINGS: What feelings contribute to my anger at you?

ACTIONS: How do I act when I am angry with you?

GOALS: How do I hope to act in the future when I am angry with you?



## The S.A.V.E. Process for Gentle, Respectful Conflict Resolution

SHARE responsibility for the problem.

- Acknowledge that we each contribute to the problem; it's no ONE's fault.
  - There's always something each of us could have done differently
- Agree that we have a mutual problem to be solved together.

ACKNOWLEDGE fully all feelings – our own and each other's.

- Share all of our feelings – including our more vulnerable ones.
- Use the dialogue process to make sure that each of us is heard and understood.

VALIDATE each other's point of view.

- Listen with at least one foot in the other's shoes to really learn each other's perspective, which is unique to each person's experience.
- Aim to be able to say, "I can understand why you would feel that way."
- Remember that seeing another person's point of view as a valid one doesn't necessarily mean we agree with it.

EXPLORE alternatives for a mutually positive solution.

- Brainstorm numerous options without judging their merits at first.
- Develop mutually positive solutions:
  - Focus on satisfying each other's underlying interests, and
  - View each other's preferences as opportunities to show our love.
- Don't hesitate to delay a final agreement -- to "sleep on it" for a while, even days or weeks -- in order to allow a mutually agreeable solution to emerge.

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Before exploring alternatives, ask:

- Are we agreed that this is a mutual problem for us to solve together?
- Have I fully acknowledged your feelings?
- Do you feel that I understand your point of view and see it as a valid one?
- Are you ready to explore alternatives as partners?

Then hug each other to connect physically as well.

NOW you're ready to explore alternatives together.



## Three Things I Appreciate About You

Three Things I Appreciate About You Are:

1.

2.

3.





## **Three Things I Want For Our Relationship**

Three Things I Want For Our Relationship Are:

1.

2.

3.



## RESOURCES

### Publications

- Conflict Resolution for Couples (audio), by Susan Heitler. 1994 (1-800-919-8899)
- Divorce Busting: A Revolutionary and Rapid Program for Staying Together  
by Michele Weiner-Davis. 1992
- Fighting for Your African American Marriage, by Keith Whitfield, Howard  
Markman, Scott Stanley, Susan Blumberg. 2001
- Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a  
Lasting Love, by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Susan Blumberg. 2001  
(and the video – 4 tapes, from Prep, Inc. 1-800-366-0166)
- The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate,  
by Gary Chapman. 1992  
(plus the audio version, 1996)
- The Hidden Value of a Man, by Gary A. Smalley, John Trent. 1997
- How to Say It For Couples: Communicating with Tenderness, Openness, and  
Honesty, by Paul W. Coleman. 2002
- The Lost Art of Listening, by Michael P. Nichols. 1995
- Love and Anger in Marriage, by David Mace (from A.C.M.E.; see below)
- Making Love Last Forever, by Gary Smalley. 1998
- Marriage magazine, published by International Marriage Encounter,  
St. Paul, MN 1-800-627-7424 (1-800-MARRIAGE)
- The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers and Their Children, by Mark Bryan. 1997
- The Secret of Staying in Love, by John Powell, S.J. 1974
- Secrets to Lasting Love: Uncovering the Keys to Life-Long Intimacy, by Gary  
Smalley. 2001  
(plus the audio version, 2000)
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families: Building a Beautiful Family Culture in a  
Turbulent World, by Stephen R. Covey. 1998
- Stop Arguing and Start Understanding: Eight Steps to Solving Family Conflicts,  
by David C. Hall. 2002
- Struggle for Intimacy, by Janet G. Woititz. 1985
- Violent No More: Helping Men End Domestic Abuse, by Michael J. Paymar. 1999
- What Children Learn from Their Parents' Marriage: It May Be Your Marriage, but It's  
Your Child's Blueprint for Intimacy, by Judith P. Siegel. 2001
- When Anger Hurts Your Relationship: 10 Simple Solutions for Couples Who Fight,  
by Kim Paleg, Matthew McKay. 2001

### **Organizations**

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) – 703-838-9808
- Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.) – 1-800-634-8325  
(A.C.M.E. online = [www.bettermarriages.org](http://www.bettermarriages.org))
- National Marriage Encounter – 1-800-828-3351
- Worldwide Marriage Encounter – 1-800-795-5683



## Relationship Skills Training Evaluation

**TOPICS and TRAINERS:** *Check the box to state how much you agree or disagree with the statement.*

1. Overall, I am satisfied with the skills I learned today.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

2. The communication skills will be helpful to me.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

3. The conflict resolution skills will be helpful to me.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

4. The new approaches to anger will be helpful to me.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

5. The trainers explained things in ways I could understand.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

6. Questions were answered to my satisfaction.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

7. I was satisfied with the respectful attitude of the trainers.

Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither       Agree       Strongly Agree

**MATERIALS/EXERCISES:** *Please check one box for each item to rate the following resources:*

1. "Communication" handouts

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

2. "Conflict Resolution" handouts

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

3. "Creating Intimacy" handouts

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

4. "I Messages" exercise

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

5. "Reflective Listening" exercise

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

6. "Behind Our Anger" exercise

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

7. "Respectful Conflict" exercise

Poor       Fair       Medium       Good       Excellent

*Please include any comments or suggestions on the back of this sheet. Thanks for your help.*