Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Interventions, Research and Policies

# *Practical Education and Enrichment Program Development*

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**Week _____**

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## *Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.*

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*Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.*

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# Learning Objectives

- **D**emonstrate an ability to apply knowledge regarding public policy, private and public child welfare services, and systems that influence family health, well-being and formation.
- **L**earn and apply assessment tools, skills, and practices appropriate to the target population for couples, children and families as a whole in order to discern challenges and supports to family health, well-being and formation.
- **D**emonstrate the ability to apply knowledge of the best practices to assessing, choosing and adapting to target population enrichment, education and skill building programs.

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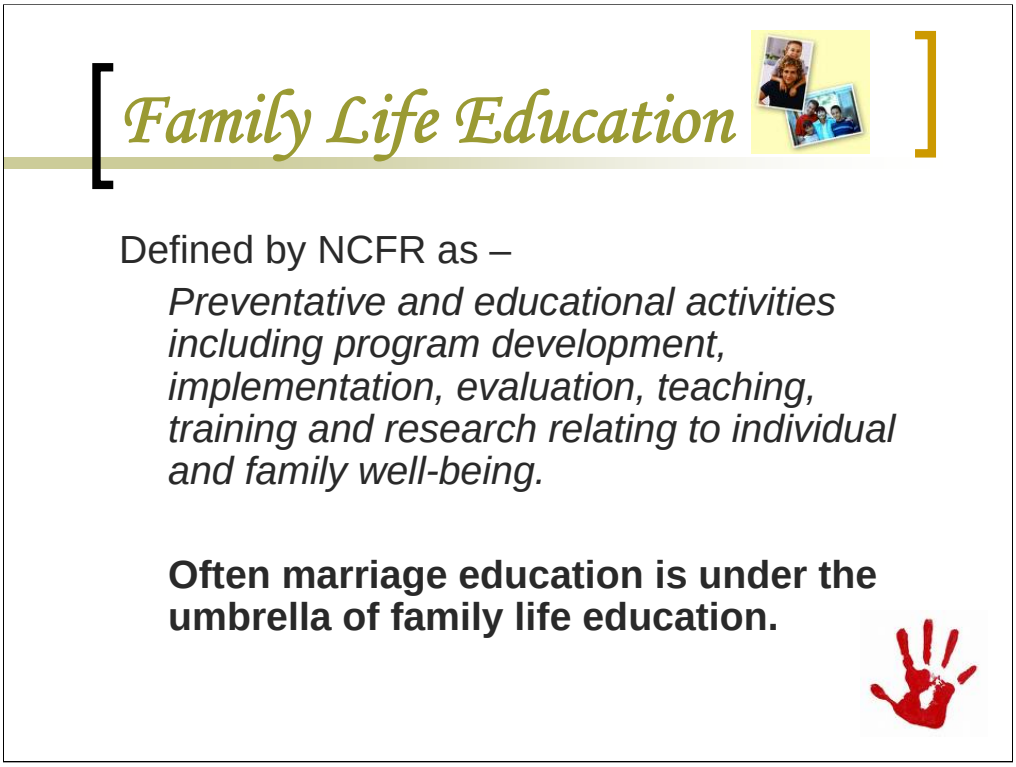


NCFR: The **National Council on Family Relations** (NCFR), founded in 1938, provides an educational forum for family researchers, educators, and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships, establishes professional standards, and works to promote family well-being. www.ncfr.org

## Understanding Various Professional Roles

- Many professionals have as their mission working with couples and families.
- Not all professional groups work at the same level or intensity.
- The following is a discussion of Family Life Educators role in marriage and relationships education and intervention.

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These next 8 slides were originally part to the orientation for the new trainees. The original course was intended to be a cross-discipline approach between social work, marriage & family therapy and child & family studies. The orientation provided an opportunity for students in each department to understand the other departments and to learn to understand each role in the provision of marriage and relationship education services.

## *Levels of Intervention for Parent and Family Educators*

- **Level 1: Minimal Emphasis on Family**
  - Interaction with parents are institution centered, not family centered. Families are not regarded as an important area of focus, but parents are dealt with for practical or legal reasons.

(Doherty, 1995)

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For handout: in appendix of Doherty article is a chart of the slide information relating to Doherty.

# Level 2: Information and Advice

- **Knowledge Base**: Content information about families, parenting and child development.
- **Personal Development**: Openness to engage parents in collaborative ways.
- **Professional Skills**:
  - Communicating information clearly and interestingly.
  - Eliciting questions.
  - Engaging a group of parents in the learning process.
  - Making pertinent and practical recommendations.
  - Providing information on community resources.

(Doherty, 1995)

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## Level 3: Feelings and Support

- **Knowledge Base**: Individual & family reactions to stress, and the emotional aspects of group process.
- **Personal Development**: Awareness of one's own feelings in relation to parents and group process.

(Doherty, 1995)

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(Doherty, 1995)

# Level 3 cont:

- **Professional Skills:**
  - Eliciting expressions of feelings & concerns.
  - Empathetic listening.
  - Normalizing feelings and reactions.
  - Creating an open a& supportive climate.
  - Protecting a parent from too much self-disclosure in a group.
  - Engaging parents in collaborative problem-solving discussion.
  - Tailoring recommendations to the unique needs, concerns, and feelings of the parent and family.
  - Identifying individual and family dysfunction.
  - Tailoring a referral to the unique situation of the parent and family.

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## Level 4: Brief Focused Intervention

- **Knowledge Base**: Family Systems Theory
- **Personal Development**: Awareness of one's own participation in systems, including one's own family, the parent's systems and larger community systems.

(Doherty, 1995)

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# Level 4 continued

- **Professional Skills**
  - Asking a series of questions to elicit a detailed picture of the family dynamics of a parent's problem.
  - Developing a hypothesis about the family systems dynamics involved in the problem.
  - Working with the parent for a short period of time to change a family interaction pattern.
  - Knowing when to end the intervention effort & refer or return to level 3 intervention.
  - Orchestrating a referral including education the family and therapist about what to expect from each other.
  - Working with therapists and community systems to help the parent and family.

(Doherty, 1995) 11

## Level 5: Family Therapy

This level is outside the scope and mission of parent and family education. The following description is offered to show the boundary between level 4 - parent and family education and level 5 - family therapy.

(Doherty, 1995)

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## Level 5 continued

- **Knowledge Base**: Family systems and patterns whereby distressed families interact with professionals and other community systems.
- **Personal Development**: Ability to handle intense emotions in families and self to maintain one's balance in the face of strong pressure from family members and other professionals.

(Doherty, 1995)

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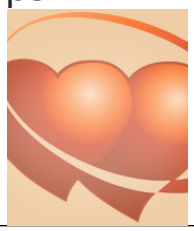
# *Defining Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE)*

US Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Healthy Marriage Initiative

- Empowers couples to build and maintain successful, stable marriages.
- Increases behaviors that make a relationship successful and decrease those associated with creating distress.
- Develops the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy relationships. Can include: *communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, goals and values, role expectations, etc*.



## *What Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education is NOT about . . .*

- **Encouraging anyone to enter into or remain in an abusive relationship.**
- **A dating service.**
- **Deciding who should marry whom.**
- **Ordering or forcing someone to get married or be in a relationship.**
- **Stigmatizing or reducing resources.**

US Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Healthy Marriage Initiative

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## *Types of Marriage and Relationship Education:*

Pre-marriage/relationship Education
Marriage/Relationship Enrichment or Enhancement
Intervention (Therapy/Counseling)

## *Types of Settings:*

Individual education
Couple Education
Group Education

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## *Preventive vs. Remedial Approaches*

- **Preventive** – couples are NOT in crisis and who want to maximize the potential for relationship wellness.

- **Remedial** – Therapy programs aimed at dysfunctional couples: *relationship satisfaction has been compromised and stability of the marriage undermined*.

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# *Levels of Prevention*

- **Primary** – designed to intervene with couples before they are experiencing difficulties.
- **Secondary** – designed for couples “at risk”, couples already experiencing some degree of relationship distress
- **Tertiary** – designed to keep serious relationship problems from getting worse and leading to separation. (Usually provided by trained therapist)

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## *Obstacles to Participation in Prevention Activities*

- **Myth of Naturalism**
  - We innately possess the knowledge and skills to form successful relationships.
- **Intra-marital Taboo**
  - What happens in our marriage stays in our marriage.
  - Cultural Taboos
- **“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”**
- **Fear**

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## *Vehicles for Connecting Marriage Education to the Child Welfare System*

- ***Youth Development*** – relationship education programs.
- ***Preventive Education*** for at-risk couples
- ***Parenting Education***
- ***Early Childhood Education***
- ***Treatment*** Plans/Therapeutic efforts

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# Program Development

Defined as

- ***a deliberate process of engaging in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating a collection of actions and activities created to meet a particular community need or achieve a designated outcome.***

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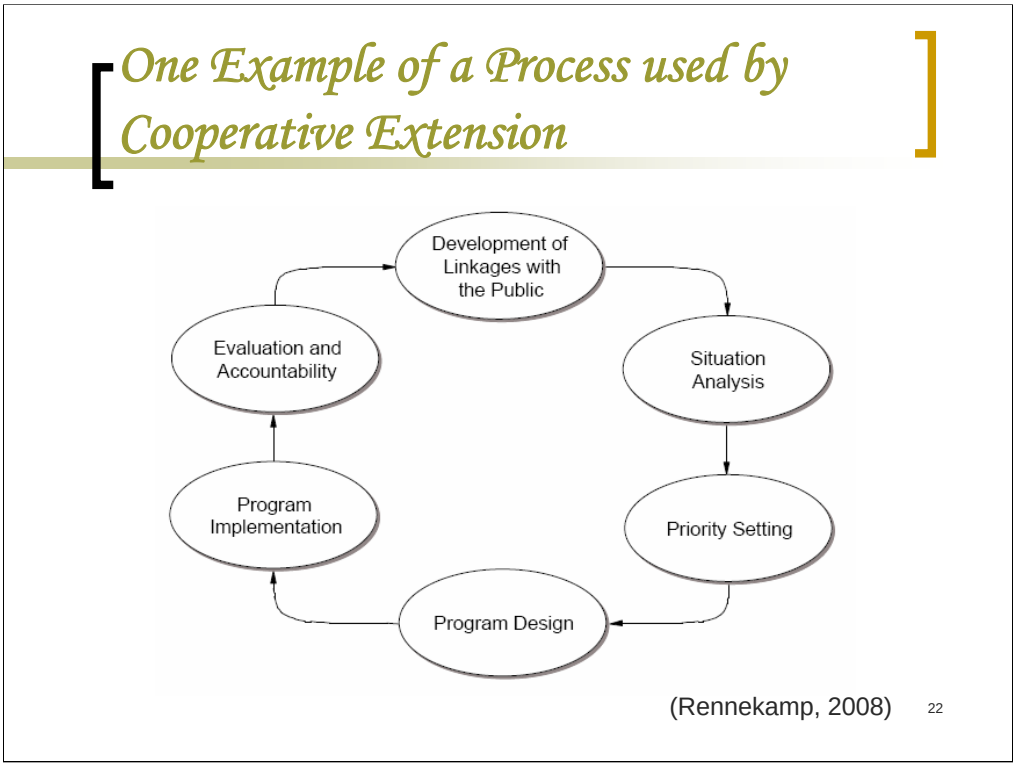


Cooperative Extensions have become one of the key developers and providers of relationship, marriage and parenting education programs. Can be a very good resource to the helping professional.

## *Designing, Implementing and Evaluating a Marriage & Relationship Education Program*

**Twelve Steps** –

1. Developing a personal philosophy.
2. Assess your own abilities
3. Assess your involvement level
4. Use theory to design/choose program
5. Understanding learning styles of Individuals you will interact with.
6. Addressing the needs of your audience.

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1. **Developing a personal belief philosophy**
   - About the nature of marriage
   - About the purpose of marriage education
   - About the content of marriage education
   - About the process of learning for individuals /couples
2. **Assessing Your Own Abilities**
   - Relating to group & one-on-one settings
   - Knowledge and skills
   - Verbal/written communication skills
   - Flexibility
   - Understanding and appreciation of diversity
   - Empathy
   - Social skills
3. **Assessing Your Involvement Level**
   (Doherty, 1995 article)
4. **Use Theory to Design Effective Program**
5. **Understand Learning Styles of Individuals You Will Interact With.**
6. **Addressing the Needs of Your Audience**
   - Felt Needs
   - Ascribed Needs
   - Future Needs
   - Developmental Needs and Abilities
   - Third Party Needs (children in welfare system)

## Twelve Steps cont.

7. Developing/Choosing content and curriculum
8. Choosing a meeting site
9. Determining size of group
10. Recruiting participants
11. Setting ground rules for interactions
12. Evaluate your program/activities

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7. **Developing Content/Curriculum**
   - Already established programs (handout)
   - Adapting/modifying existing programs
   - Developing your own – research-based/outcome-based program – More difficult and time Consuming
8. **Recruitment – getting people to participate**
   - Personal Invitation
   - Flyers. Ads, Announcements
   - Referrals, Word of Mouth
9. **Choosing a Meeting Site**
10. **Determining size of group**
11. **Setting Ground Rules for Interactions**
   - Self-disclosure
   - Amount of participation expected
   - Confidentiality and respect is expected
12. **Evaluate Your Program/Activities**
   - Is your program successful?
   - What changes are needed?
   - Use outcome-based evaluations

# Know Yourself

## 1.Personal Beliefs:

- About the nature of marriage.
- About the purpose of marriage education.
- About the content of marriage education.
- About the process of learning for individuals/couples.

## 2. Your Own Abilities:

- Relating to group & 1-on-1 settings
- Knowledge & skills
- Verbal/Written communication skills
- Flexibility
- Understanding and appreciation of diversity
- Empathy
- Social Skills

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## 6. Addressing Needs of Audience:

- Felt Needs
- Ascribed Needs
- Future Needs

- Developmental Needs and Abilities
- Third Party Needs (Ex: Child Welfare System)

### Process:

1. Ask
2. Study
3. Observe

*How?* Focus Groups, Interviews, Observations, Surveys and Questionnaires

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## 7. Developing Content

- Can use established programs.
- Modify or adapt existing programs.
- Create a program that is research-based and outcome driven.

THE RECRUITMENT CHALLENGE

## 8. Recruitment

- Personal Invitation
- Flyers, Ads, Announcements
- Referrals, Word of Mouth

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## 11. Setting Ground Rules

- Self-disclosure.
- Amount of participation expected.
- Confidentiality and Respect expected.

## 12. Evaluation

- Has it made an impact on behavior?
- Design into the program an outcome-based evaluation.
- Is your program successful?
- What changes are needed?

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# Level 5 continued

- **Professional Skills (sampling):**
  - Interviewing families or family members who are quite difficult to engage.
  - Efficiently generating & testing hypotheses about the family's difficulties & interaction patterns.
  - Escalating conflict in the family in order to break a family impasse.
  - Working intensely with families during crisis.
  - Constructively dealing with a family's strong resistance to change.
  - Negotiating collaborative relationships with other professionals and other systems who are working with the family, even when these groups are at odds with one another.

(Doherty, 1995)

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## Promising Practices in Designing Relationship Education Programs

- Review of Handout titled:
  - *Promising Practices for Relationship Ed Literature Summary*

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## Overview of Some MRE Programs

- Over the course of the semester, the following programs will be presented in more detail:
  - Family Wellness: Survival Skills for Healthy Families.
  - PREPARE/ENRICH
  - Relationship Enhancement
  - Structural Family Therapy

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See handout “Marriage Education: List of Programs and Curricula” handout and the NHMRC indepth charts on ”Relationship Skills Training and Marriage Education Programs”

# Recommended Reading

- Doherty W.J. (1995). Boundaries between parent and family education and family therapy. *Family Relations,* 44, 353-358.

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Website to refer to: www.familylifeeducation2e.com