# PREVENTION AND RELATIONSHIP ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (PREP)

## What is PREP?

PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) is a divorce-prevention/marriage enhancing program. PREP is a skills and principles-building curriculum designed to help partners improve their communication and problem solving skills as well as increase their connection with each other. PREP is education, not therapy.

## Who designed PREP and why?

- Howard Markman, Ph.D., Scott Stanley, Ph.D. and Susan Blumberg, Ph.D. created PREP in the early 1980s.

- The founders created PREP because they found the quality of communication before and during marriage was one of the best predictors of future marital distress.

- Research shows that while therapy can be extremely helpful in certain situations, much of what goes wrong in loving relationships has much to do with never having learned the skills and principles associated with successful relationships. That's why the founders of PREP developed an educational program to teach couples the skills and principles they need to maintain a healthy and lasting relationship.

  **Howard J. Markman, Ph.D.** is a professor of psychology and Director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver. A noted expert on marriage, he specializes in research on the prediction and prevention of marital distress. Dr. Markman has published extensively in professional journals, and regularly appears as an expert on marriage in the media. He has co-authored the books *We Can Work It Out* and *Fighting for Your Marriage*, as well as co-produced the Fighting for Your Marriage video and audio tapes.

  **Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D.** is Co-Director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies and an adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Denver. He has authored numerous research articles on relationships and is an expert on marital commitment. Along with the co-authors, Dr. Stanley has co-authored the book *Fighting for Your Marriage* and developed video and audio-tapes by the same title. He is also the co-author of *A Lasting Promise* and author of *The Heart of Commitment*. Additionally, he regularly contributes to print and broadcast media as an expert on marriage.

## What are the founding principles of PREP?

- Over time, couples must increasingly deal with problems of life together.

- Markman found that the quality of communication before marriage and before distress had developed was one of the best predictors of future marital distress.

- What couples argue about and how they argue is a function of both their expectations and their abilities to communicate and negotiate effectively.

- PREP provides a research-based, skills building curriculum designed to teach couples effective communication and problem solving skills to enhance their marital satisfaction.

## How long has PREP existed?

- Howard Markman, Ph.D., Scott Stanley, Ph.D. and Susan Blumberg, Ph.D. created PREP in the early 1980s.

## What research findings support the effectiveness of PREP?

Along with colleagues around the United States, Germany, Australia, Holland, and elsewhere, Drs. Markman and Stanley have conducted numerous studies on marital success and distress. Much of the research conducted at the University of Denver has been funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. The word "empirical" means that these researchers actually observed and tested real couples over many years. Couples were taught different kinds of PREP skills in various settings and in different ways. Then these couples were compared to similar couples who did not get the PREP education. Couples took various paper and pencil tests and discussed issues while being video-taped. The researchers have analyzed hundreds of hours of these videotapes and used complex coding systems to identify and categorize different aspects of the couple's conversations. They tracked these couples in three different studies, for long periods of time. As a result of all this, the researchers have isolated several risk factors that can make a big difference in whether a marriage will be happy or not.

Many studies find that couples not only like PREP, but they benefited significantly:

- PREP couples have lower rates of premarital break-up and post marital divorce.
  In a large-scale study in Denver, PREP couples as compared to control couples had 1/3 the likelihood of breaking up, up through 5 years following the program (combining premarital and post-marital break up).
- PREP couples have shown a greater likelihood of maintaining relationship satisfaction for a few years following training, in one major long term study.
- PREP couples have lower levels of negative communication and higher levels of positive communication immediately following the program, and maintain these advantages up to 5 years later (based on studies in the U.S., Germany, and Australia).
- PREP couples, in one study, have reported lower levels of physical aggression in the years after taking the program.
- PREP couples enjoy taking the program because of the "hands on" skill oriented nature of the material.
- Premarital couples taking PREP given by clergy or lay leaders in their religious organization (as well as when given by university staff) communicate more positively and less negatively following training.

## Who facilitates PREP?

- Since PREP is an educational program, and not therapy, no specific credentials are necessary.
- A PREP leader should be someone with good people skills, some organizational skills, and good presentation (speaking) ability.
- PREP has trained over 9,065 mental health, nursing, education, and other professionals including clergy and lay leaders from 28 countries to become PREP Instructors.
- Different levels of Instructor Training are conducted at various locations around the world. Costs, materials and specific schedule vary depending on training site and the organization hosting the training.
- The PREP Training is an 18 hour course presented over three days. The Three-Day training qualifies participants to become Instructors and to use all supporting PREP materials in the various workshop formats (e.g., 6 week, weekend, One-Day with two evening follow-up, One-Day only, etc.).

- In addition to training in PREP, PREP leaders may seek specialized training in Christian PREP (CPREP). PREP has also been adopted for special populations including: military personnel, prisoners, low-income individuals, and high school students.

**Who attends PREP?**

- PREP is appropriate for both non-distressed and distressed couples and individuals.

- A PREP leader can use PREP to help non-distressed couples prevent problems and reverse negative patterns in earlier stages of development.

- A PREP leader who is also a therapist can use PREP as part of an intervention with distressed couples.

**What skills and knowledge will I learn from PREP?**

**The 5 main objectives of the program are:**

1) the development and guided practice of constructive communication and conflict resolution skills
2) the clarification and modification of relationship beliefs and expectations
3) the maintenance and enhancement of fun, friendship, and spiritual connection in intimate relationships
4) having the couple leave the program with agreed upon set of ground rules for handling disagreements and conflict that inevitably occur in relationships, and
5) the development of skills to enhance, understand, and maintain commitment

**Topics in the program include:**

- interactional danger signs of future problems
- gender differences
- using structure to promote safety
- the speaker/listener technique
- problem solving
- ground rules for handling conflict
- strategies for dealing with issues versus events
- forgiveness

**Is PREP offered for specific populations?**

**Yes**, PREP has programs for specific populations, including:

- Christian PREP
- Prisoners
- Low-income individuals
- Military
- High school students

Brief summaries of the some of the programs offered for these populations are below.

**Christian PREP (CPREP)**

- Christian PREP trainings integrate a theological framework of understanding for marital health and distress.

- Christian PREP is a program reflecting a clear commitment to traditional Christianity and Christian truth. The model of integration employed here gives first place to the revelation of scripture and second place to sound research. If revelation and research are in conflict, revelation wins out.

- The fact is, however there are many areas in which Christian teaching and secular research overlap, and while one source or the other may vary in detail or depth, the overall emphases are remarkably similar. For example, both scripture and Christian traditions strongly emphasize communication, commitment, and relational harmony.

- Research in this area does not lead to conclusions that are contrary to Christian principles. Rather, the research seems to us to add to the foundation of Christian principles by suggesting specific strategies or insights that help couples achieve the kind of relationships reflected in scripture and traditional Christian teaching.

**Prison PREP**

- Program is designed to train inmates to be good partners and spouses and to handle negative emotions

- Its ultimate goal is to help inmates successfully reintegrate with families and not commit another crime

**Low-Income PREP – "Within My Reach"**

- First dissemination training offered in June of 2005

- PREP Inc. has plans to roll out its 1st edition and revise upon its base during the coming year

- "Within My Reach" is PREP's new relationship skills and decision making program for helping individuals achieve their goals in relationships, family and marriage. The participants are individuals, not couples

- In addition to the typical PREP curriculum, this program also focuses on additional issues affecting low-income couples

- The program's overall goals are:
  1. Help those in viable relationships to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their unions, and to marry if desired
  2. Help those in damaging relationships to leave safely, at some point
  3. Help those desiring a romantic relationship and/or marriage in the future to choose partners wisely

**What types of format(s) is PREP offered in?**

- There are many ways couples can learn the PREP approach. Couples can learn on their own using various PREP materials including video tapes, audio tapes and books.

- Couples can also attend public workshops ranging from Weekend Workshops, to six weekly sessions, to One-Day workshops taught by independent PREP Instructors.

- Couples may also be coached in the PREP approach privately by a PREP Instructor. Many PREP Instructors are also trained therapists and can offer PREP in conjunction with more intensive therapy if more serious problems are of concern.

**What is the contact information for PREP?**

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