

Premarital Counseling: An Evidence-informed Treatment Protocol

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11/16/11

Treatment Protocol

- **Based on**
 - Empirically-based recommendations for premarital counseling
 - Protective factors and risk factors for marital distress & marital dissolution
 - Surveys on participant & non-participant preferences
 - The work and suggestions of experts
 - Traditional premarital prevention programs
 - Common factors research

Format

- **6 private one-on-one conjoint sessions**
- **2 postmarital booster sessions**
- **Primarily interactive**
 - In-session discussion, role-plays, and skill practice
 - Improves attitudes, behaviors, skill learning, & implementation of skills in daily interactions more than psychoeducational lectures
 - Generates high levels of interest among potential premarital counseling participants

Goals

- **Assessment**
 - Premarital Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ)
 - Relationship History (SRHI)
 - Genogram
 - Observation
- **Collaborative identification of 5 specific focus areas**
- **Interpersonal skills training**
 - Insight, awareness, understanding, problem-solving around the specific focus areas

Assessment

FORMAL

- Premarital Assessment Questionnaires (PAQs)*
 - *Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding Study (FOCCUS)*
 - *PREmarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE)*
 - *RELATIONship Evaluation (RELATE)*

INFORMAL

- Structured relationship history interview
- Genograms
- Interactional/process observations

*Most psychometrically-sound, widely available, easily administered, & easily interpreted

Session Objectives

- **Prior to Session 1**
 - **When a couple calls requesting premarital counseling, ask them to complete a Premarital Assessment Questionnaire and email the results to you prior to the first session**
 - This allows you the opportunity to review and discuss the formal assessment and collaboratively determine the specific focus areas during the first session

Formal Assessments: PAQs

- Gather multidimensional information
- Identify protective factors and risk factors for marital distress
- Help couples identify and subsequently discuss strengths and challenge areas within their relationship
- provide a snapshot of partners' relationship perceptions
- Cannot provide a verdict as to whether or not they should marry

Formal Assessments: PAQs

- **Advantages**
 - Increases the level of couple investment and involvement
 - Provides objective feedback about the relationship
 - Focuses discussions on topics and skills identified by the PAQ
 - Provides the counselor with a considerable amount of information in a considerably small amount of time

Formal Assessments: PAQs

- **Advantages (continued)**
 - Reduces the cost of counseling (PAQs completed at home)
 - Supplies helpful multidimensional information about the couple and their relationship
 - Provides normative information about the couple
 - Identifies specific couple patterns and types
 - Provides longitudinal data about the couple if they take the PAQ again (e.g., end of counseling, after marriage)

Session 1 Objectives

- Obtain informed consent
- Join
- Share expectations
- Determine format
- Review and discuss PAQ results
- Identify goals for treatment
- Identify & prioritize 5 specific focus areas from the "menu"
- Homework
 - Read Doherty (2000): consumer & covenant marriages
 - <http://marriageandfamilies.byu.edu/issues/2000/August/consumer.aspx>
 - Obtain Larson (2000): premarital self-guided learning book
 - Summarizes premarital protective & risk factors literature
 - Obtain one workbook:
 - Hardin & Sloan (1992)
 - Parrott & Parrott (2006)

The Menu

MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS TO COVER IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE ACCORDING TO POTENTIAL PREMARITAL PARTICIPANTS:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ▪ Communication | ▪ Sexual intimacy |
| ▪ Finances | ▪ Commitment |
| ▪ Problem-solving | ▪ The marriage ceremony |
| ▪ Having children | ▪ Marital roles |
| ▪ Expectations | ▪ Personality |
| ▪ Family-of-origin issues | ▪ Friends |
| ▪ Parenting skills | ▪ Leisure activities |
| ▪ Religion | ▪ Balancing home and career |
| ▪ Goals | |

Session 2 Objectives

- Discuss the Doherty (2002) reading homework
- Conduct the structured relationship history inventory (SRHI; Stahman & Hiebert, 1997)
- Homework:
 - Begin reading Larson (2000)
 - Write down 12 – 15 reasons why they want to marry their partner (Buckner & Salts, 1985)

Structured Relationship History Inventory (SRHI)

(Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997)

- First Meeting
- First Impressions
- Second Date
- Second Impressions
- Family's and Friends' Responses
- Exclusivity and Inclusivity
- Bonding Process: Steady Dating
- Separations
- Bonding Process
- Engagement
- Conflict
- Communication Behaviors
- Family-of-Origin Material
- Affection and Sex
- Reaction to Engagement
- Planning the Wedding

Session 3 Objectives

- Discuss homework
- Conduct genogram work (Stahman & Hiebert, 1997)
- Fine-tune goals and specific focus areas now that assessment is completed
- Homework:
 - Continue reading Larson (2000)

Genogram Questions

- General Family Information
- Family Relationships
- Parents' Relationship
- Parenting
- Family of Origin Conclusions
- Partner's Family
- Current Relationship

Session 4 Objectives

- Discuss homework
- Conduct interpersonal skills training
- Homework:
 - Practice implementing interpersonal skills by discussing and/or solving an agreed-upon topic (e.g., one of the specific focus areas)
 - Continue reading Larson (2000)
 - Complete selected workbook activities (e.g., related to one of the specific focus areas)

Session 5 Objectives

- Discuss homework
- Explore specific focus areas through both psychoeducation and discussion using the interpersonal skills
- Homework:
 - Practice implementing interpersonal skills by discussing and/or solving an agreed-upon topic (e.g., one of the specific focus areas)
 - Continue reading Larson (2000)
 - Complete selected workbook activities (e.g., one of the specific focus areas)

Session 6 Objectives

- Discuss homework
- Explore specific focus areas through
 - Psychoeducation
 - Discussion using interpersonal skills
- Optional: invite parents to attend
 - Process how marriage may change their relationships
 - Welcome the new couple into the family
 - Share marital advice
- Use solution-focused premarital counseling relationship questions
 - Murray & Murray (2004)
- Review what has been helpful
- Set up 1st post-wedding booster session
 - Approximately 6 months after marriage or Session 6
- Homework:
 - Continue implementing interpersonal skills when germane
 - Finish reading Larson (2000)

Post-Wedding Booster Session 1

(Approximately 6 months after marriage or Session 6)

- Call the couple a few weeks before to confirm the appointment & ask them to complete RELATE again & email the results prior to the booster session
- Ask the couple
 - how their relationship is going
 - which aspects of the premarital sessions were most helpful
 - to identify aspects of their relationship that they perceive as
 - Strengths
 - Weaknesses
- Review & discuss the RELATE results
- Collaboratively
 - determine a specific focus area the couple will focus on during the next 6 months
 - identify specific goals within the focus area
- Set up 2nd post-wedding booster session in approximately 6 months
- Homework:
 - Based on current marital quality, obtain & read one of the following marriage enrichment self-guided learning books:
 - Take Back Your Marriage (Doherty 2003)
 - The Divorce Remedy (Davis, 2003)

Post-Wedding Booster Session 2

(Approximately 1 year after marriage or Session 6)

- Ask the couple to
 - describe how their relationship is going
 - talk about how they did on their specific goals
- Work with the couple on *looking ahead at their relationship* (Halford et al., 2006):
- Recommend marriage enrichment program participation further down the road as a tune-up for their marriage

Post-Wedding Booster Session 2

(Approximately 1 year after marriage or Session 6)

- Work with the couple on *looking ahead at their relationship* (Halford et al., 2006):
 - Life changes likely to occur in the next few years for which they think would be useful to plan
 - Have them discuss their relationship vision
 - How do they celebrate their relationship now?
 - How can they enhance how they celebrate their relationship?
 - How they will maintaining a relationship focus
 - 5 things they are already doing to strengthen their relationship that they want to continue doing
 - How will they ensure they continue doing those things?
 - What behaviors are unacceptable in their relationship?
 - What would they do if/when such behaviors did occur in their relationship,
 - What would get in their way of seeking help?