

## Why is Relationship Education Important?

The best way to prevent divorce and marital discord is to intervene before problems start, by providing skills-based training and information to promote strong and healthy relationships. In fact, research has shown that couples with little or no distress respond better to enrichment or therapeutic services than do those already in distress.<sup>(1)</sup> Below are results from meta-analyses and longitudinal studies on the impact of Marriage Education classes in helping couples learn the skills associated with marital success.

- A meta-analysis of 20 different marriage programs across 85 studies involving 3,886 couples found an average positive effect size of 0.44, indicating that the average couple participating in any one of the Marriage Education programs studied improved their behavior and quality of relationship so that they were better off than more than two-thirds of the couples that did not participate in any Marriage Education program.<sup>(2)</sup>
- A meta-analysis of 16 studies observed meaningful program effects with regard to gains in communication skills, marital satisfaction, and other relationship qualities. The average couple after taking the Marriage Education training was able to outperform 83% of couples who had not participated in the program in the critical area of marital communication.<sup>(3)</sup>
- A longitudinal study on a well-known Marriage Education program found that, compared with couples without the training, participating couples maintained high levels of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction and lower problem intensity three years after training; they also demonstrated significantly greater communication skills, less negative communication patterns, and greater conflict-management skills up to 12 years after instruction, and reported fewer instances of physical violence with their spouses three to five years after training.<sup>(4)</sup>
- In a meta-analysis of over 100 studies on the impact of Marriage Education, researchers found clear evidence that Marriage Education programs work—“to reduce strife, improve communication, increase parenting skills, increase stability, and enhance marital happiness.” They concluded, “This research demonstrates that marriage programs are effective and makes the case that marriages can do more than merely survive: They can also thrive when couples learn the skills to make their relationship work.”<sup>(5)</sup>

(1) Van Widenfelt, B., Markman, H. J., Guerney, B., Behrens, B. C., & Hosman, C., (1997). Prevention and relationship problems. In W. K. Halford & J. J. Markman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of marriage and couples interventions* (pp. 651-675). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

(2) Giblin, P., et al., (1985). Enrichment outcome research: A meta-analysis of premarital, marital, and family interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 11, 257-271.

(3) Butler, M. H., & Wampler, K. S. (1999). A meta-analytic update on research on the Couple Communication Program. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 27, 223.

(4) Markman, H. J., et al. (1988). Prevention of marital distress: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, pp. 210-217. Also, see Markman, H. J., et al, (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A four and five year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 1-8.

- (5) Fagan, P. F., Patterson, R. W., & Rector, R. E. (2002). Marriage and welfare reform: The overwhelming evidence that marriage education works. *The Heritage Foundation*. Backgrounder #1606, 2002. [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)