

What Are The Barriers To A Healthy Marriage?

OBJECTIVES:

1. Examine the barriers to a healthy marriage.
2. Identify the characteristics of a healthy marriage.
3. Assess the impact of an unhealthy marriage on children.

HANDOUTS:

1. *Diane and Kevin, Part I*
2. *Diane and Kevin, Part II*
3. *Diane and Kevin, Part III*
4. *What is a Healthy Marriage?*
5. *Take Home Message for This Session*

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Scrapbooking materials
- Flipchart and markers
- Pens and pencils
- DVD from Oakland County Circuit Court, Michigan, titled **SMILE: Start Making It Livable for Everyone**, 2006.

GETTING STARTED

At our last session, we talked about the positive benefits of a healthy marriage for our health. We also asked you to identify two steps you could take to better prepare yourself for a healthy marriage. Does anyone have any reactions, experiences, or thoughts they would like to share?

Let's now turn to today's session. We will talk more about the kinds of things that go on in a healthy marriage. We will also talk about things that threaten a healthy marriage.

In today's session, we are going to talk about the things that people in healthy marriages do to make their marriages healthy. But before I share this information with you, I want to make a few comments about other barriers to healthy marriages that need to be considered.

ACTIVITY: Diane And Kevin

Diane and Kevin want to get married. They are new parents. Diane hopes to finish high school and has to choose where she wants to live and with whom. I am going to read you their story in three parts. After each part, we will discuss the kind of strengths that Diane and Kevin have that would lead to a healthy marriage. We will also look at the things that will interfere with their ability to have a healthy marriage.

Draw these conclusions at the end of the case study:

You have identified a number of reasons why Diane and Kevin will have difficulty achieving a healthy marriage. Researchers have also identified factors including:

- People who have health problems or low education have dimmer prospects for obtaining a healthy marriage.
- They do not have much money and not having money is a barrier to getting their own place.

- Being poor puts strain on individuals as well as relationships.
- Children from previous relationships become a source of conflict in new relationships.

Diane and Kevin with help can achieve a healthy relationship. What are things that would help them? [Use below to get the group thinking.]

- Kevin needs to go to AA or another alcohol treatment program in order to stay sober.
- They can get couples counseling or education to help learn more positive ways to deal with their differences.
- Both can get employment training and job placement services to improve their job prospects.
- Diane needs to finish high school.

ACTIVITY: Mini-Lecture on Characteristics of Healthy Marriages

Prepare a PowerPoint presentation or flipcharts with the following information.

During the last session we talked about the five to one rule. That is, for every negative interaction you have with your partner, you need to counter it with five positive interactions. Today, building on our discussion about Kevin and Diane, we are going to look at some other things we see in healthy marriages.

Here is what researchers have found:

- **Commitment:** Taking a long-term view of one's relationships, intending to stay together even when times get tough, and being committed to care for the other person.
- **Satisfaction:** Being individually or personally satisfied with the marriage.

- **Communication:** Having positive and respectful communication with each other, being able to compromise, and having a sense of humor.
- **Conflict resolution:** Dealing with disagreements and conflict as they arise, successfully solving problems together, and accepting differences (i.e., agree to disagree).
- **Lack of domestic violence:** Not accepting violence as a normal part of conflict! Conflict can be a normal and natural part of life but not physical or emotional violence.
- **Fidelity:** Being faithful to one's spouse; being unfaithful is a deal-breaker for most couples.
- **Spending time together.**
- **Emotional support and intimacy:** Having feelings of trust, caring, and love; and physical intimacy and affection.
- **Commitment to children:** Being committed to the development and well-being of all children born to or adopted by either spouse.
- **Duration and legal status of marriage:** Recognizing that kids develop best when their parents marry and stay married, as long as the marriage does not have violence and high levels of conflict.

Think about Diane and Kevin again. Which areas do they need to work on?

Think about the couple relationships and marriages of people who are close to you. Which areas do they have problems with? Which areas are they strongest in?

Think about your relationship with your child's other parent. Did your relationship have any of these positive aspects? How about negative ones?

Think about yourself and any current relationship you have. Which areas do you need to work on?

ACTIVITY: **The Importance Of Healthy Marriages For Children**

Just as a healthy marriage is good for adults, it is good for children. And just as an unhealthy marriage is not good for adults, the same is true for children. To help you better understand the impact of an unhealthy marriage on children, we are going to play a short DVD that shows interviews with children whose parents have divorced. As you watch the video, make note of how these children felt and how their parents' divorces affected them.

Discuss:

- What experiences did the children describe when their parents were going through their divorces?
- How were the children affected by their parents' divorces?
- What did the DVD suggest in terms of helping children through divorce?
- What if parents are not married but still do not get along with each other? Do you think this affects children negatively?

Probably the most important thing for you to take away from this video is this: high levels of conflict between parents are very difficult for children whether or not the parents are married. In addition, you need to consider how any future decisions you make about marriage will impact your children.



ACTIVITY:
Scrapbook and Homework

Have participants prepare a scrapbook page that denotes their commitment to having a healthy relationship with their child's other parent and with any other people they become involved with.

Give participant the take-home message for this session and have them write down their action steps on the take-home message. Remind them to place the take-home message in the magnetic frame.

CLOSING:

Today we looked further at what a healthy marriage is and discussed things that might interfere with people attaining a healthy marriage. We learned that a healthy marriage has low conflict and other important characteristics. Lastly, we discussed how important a healthy marriage is for children.

REFERENCE:

Moore, K. A., Jekielek, S. M., Bronte-Tinkew, J., Guzman, L., Ryan, S., and Redd, Z. (2004). **What Is a Healthy Marriage? Defining the Concept.** Washington, DC: Child Trends. URL: www.childtrends.org



Diane And Kevin Part 1

Diane and Kevin recently had a baby girl together. Diane and the baby live with her mother in Section 8 housing. Diane hopes to graduate from high school in the spring but is not sure she can. She had a lot of trouble during her pregnancy and fell behind on her schoolwork.

Kevin really wants to marry Diane but still lives with his parents. He says that he loves her and the baby and wants to live with them full-time. Kevin works about 20 hours a week

as a clerk at the local mini-mart. He does not have enough money to rent a place for himself and Diane.

Kevin's parents have invited Diane and the baby to live with them in their house until they have enough money to get a place of their own. Diane views Kevin's parents as "pushy" and "opinionated." Diane is happy living with her mother, but she is frustrated because she would like to live with Kevin, too.

Questions:

1. Do you think Diane and Kevin are ready to get married?

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2. In what ways are they ready?

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3. What things might lead to problems if they get married?

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Diane And Kevin Part II

Kevin is ten years older than Diane. Kevin has been married before and has three children from his first marriage. He got married right out of high school but that marriage ended in divorce four years later. He had a lot of financial problems since the divorce and hadn't been able to pay his child support. By living at home, he can make at least partial payments.

Kevin finished high school but he had to go right to work to support his new family. He does not have marketable job skills and hasn't had the money to go back to school as he had hoped. Plus he sometimes would rather hang

out with his friends when he has the time. Five years ago, Kevin went into an alcohol treatment program. It's been hard to stay sober, but he can go for long stretches if he gets himself to AA meetings a couple of times a week.

Diane has had a few run-ins with the police. When she was a freshman in high school she was referred to the juvenile authorities for beating up a girl who she thought was picking on her. Two years ago, Diane was picked up for shop-lifting at a local department store. Her mother came to her defense and paid for the merchandise and Diane was let off.

Questions:

1. Now what do you think about Diane and Kevin's relationship?

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2. Has your opinion changed about the possibilities of them getting married? Why or why not?

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3. What specific issues might interfere with a healthy marriage?

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Diane And Kevin Part III

Diane's mother is concerned about Kevin and Diane getting married. Twice during Diane's pregnancy, Diane came home from seeing Kevin with bruises on her arms. When she asked Diane about the bruises, Diane said she ran into a wall. Diane's mother suspects that Kevin pushed her around while they were arguing.

Diane hasn't told her mother the reason why Kevin and she were arguing. Before Diane knew she was pregnant with Kevin's baby, she was seeing Dion at the same time. Kevin later found out, and he accused Diane of being unfaithful and claimed that Dion was her baby's father. Diane insisted that Kevin was the father and that Dion and she were just friends. Just to be sure, a

paternity test was done to verify that Kevin was the father.

At the same time, Kevin is getting a great deal of pressure from his ex-wife about supporting his family. She is accusing Kevin of not spending enough time with his three children from his first marriage. She even called Diane and told her to back off.

Diane and Kevin are fighting less since the baby was born. Lately, though, Diane has noticed that she is missing Dion. He is such a kind person and really listens to what she has to say. He doesn't grow impatient with her like Kevin or push her around. Diane even called Dion from a pay phone but hung up without saying anything.

Questions:

1. What do you think Diane and Kevin should do?

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2. Do you think they should get married? Why or why not?

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3. If they get married, what things should they address first?

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What Is A Healthy Marriage?

- **Commitment**

Taking a long-term view of one's relationships, intending to stay together even when times get tough, and being committed to care for the other person.

- **Satisfaction**

Being individually or personally satisfied with the marriage.

- **Communication**

Having positive and respectful communication with each, being able to compromise, and having a sense of humor.

- **Conflict resolution**

Dealing with disagreements and conflict as they arise, successfully solving problems together, and accepting differences (i.e., agree to disagree).

- **Lack of domestic violence**

Not accepting violence as a normal part of conflict! Conflict can be a normal and natural part of life but not physical or emotional violence.

- **Fidelity**

Being faithful to one's spouse; being unfaithful is a deal-breaker for most couples.

- **Spending time together**

Enjoying each other's company.

- **Emotional support and intimacy**

Having feelings of trust, caring, and love; and physical intimacy and affection.

- **Commitment to children**

Being committed to the development and well-being of all children born to or adopted by either spouse.

- **Duration and legal status of marriage**

Recognizing that kids develop best when their parents marry and stay married, as long as the marriage is not violent and highly conflicted.



Take Home Message for This Session

Directions: Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**A healthy marriage
is important
for my children.**

My Action Steps:

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.....

The Next Session:

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DATE

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TIME

.....
LOCATION

