

Recruiting Couples That Are Living Together for Relationship Education

Reaching out to couples who live together is different than reaching out to those who are married.

Introduction

Studies show that people who live together but aren't married have more relationship problems than married couples. Also, people who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce later on and are less likely to go to relationship education programs than engaged couples. For these reasons, getting these couples in marriage education is important.

What Type of Relationship Education is Right for Couples Living Together?

Couples who are living together do not always want a long-term future together, so traditional marriage education is not the best match for these couples. Although many relationship issues are the same, couples who are living together and who aren't married can have very different needs from couples who are already married or planning marriage. A relationship educator should know the needs of each couple sharing a home to choose what type of relationship

education will be the best fit for them. In addition, it is important for marriage educators to be mindful of the message they are sending. Do not criticize living together or make statements that may sound judgmental. Instead, tell them you are giving them the necessary skills for a healthy relationship. For example, if the couple is in a relationship for life or is planning marriage, and they are in a physically safe relationship, going to relationship education together

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is best. There, they will learn skills to help their relationship last. On the other hand, if one or both partners is not sure about the future of the relationship or feels unsafe, it may be better for the partners to attend a relationship education program for singles. In such a program, people learn how to know if their relationships are healthy and find out how to make good choices about the future.

Issues to Consider

Recruiting Couples who Live Together for Relationship Education

Reaching out to couples who live together is different than reaching out to those who are married. Couples living together could be engaged, "dating," or feel they are married. One of the main differences between the



two groups is the fact that couples who live together are less likely to be part of faith groups than married couples are. Faith groups tend to be a major source of recruitment for marriage education programs but for couples who are living together this may not be the best place to get the word out.

Here are some ways to recruit people who share a household to relationship education programs:

- **Offer classes that target people who are living together.** Because people who are living together have different needs, they might not think that typical relationship education programs will be right for them. In order to target this group, it is important to tailor your classes so they do not specifically use words like “in-laws.” Rather, use examples like “your partner’s mother” or “issues with extended family.”
- **Come up with advertising messages for people who are living together.** Because people who are living together may not be sure if they want their relationships to continue into marriage,

Offer programs that include education about co-parenting, especially for couples who have children from other relationships.

avoid using language in advertisements that says “marriage education.” Instead, messages should say “relationship skills like communication skills and problem solving.” Couples who are living together may struggle with making decisions, paying bills, or the role of extended family. More sample language may be “Check up on your relationship!” or “Learn how to make your relationship last.”

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- **Frame relationship education as a way to “test drive” relationships.** Some couples are living together to test their relationships before marriage. Marketing materials with this kind of language may appeal to many. There’s no better way to test-drive a relationship than to attend a relationship education class!
- **Target places and services that couples who share a household visit.** Online posting boards for apartment hunters, local rental agencies, large apartment complexes, furniture or home goods stores, and grocery stores might be particularly good places to start. Graduate school and community newsletters are good, too.
- **Don’t forget the kids.** A large percentage of couples living together are raising children. Offer programs that include education about co-parenting, especially for couples who have children from other relationships. Recruitment announcements geared toward parents and advertised in daycare centers, schools, and pediatrician offices will likely prove useful.
- **Use the Internet.** People who are living together tend to be younger, so for your marketing, use media outlets that younger people use. The Internet can be especially productive. Have a website about your relationship education program. Use language such as living together, committed, or seriously dating. Use social networking websites

to get the word out about your program and give people the choice to email you about attending. Send an electronic announcement to colleagues via email and ask them to forward it to people who might be interested.

When you sign a couple up for a class, ask them if they know others who could use your service.

- **Use word of mouth.** Word of mouth is a great recruitment tool. When you sign a couple up for a class, ask them if they know others who could use your service. Have catchy announcements ready to hand out (or email) to people who sign up so that they can tell friends about your class.

Conclusion

Couples who live together may or may not have plans to get married; it is important to consider this when

fitting a relationship education class for them and when getting the word out to them. Because married couples are more likely to be part of a religious group, this main source of recruitment is not the best choice for people living together. Online posting sites and websites, graduate school and community newsletters and daycares are some of the suggested sources when advertising relationship education programs.

Thanks to Galena Kline Rhoades, Ph.D., for her contributions to this Tip Sheet. Dr. Rhoades is a Senior Researcher for the Center for Marital and Family Studies in the Psychology Department at the University of Denver. Her research projects include romantic relationship development and functioning and related implications for children and adults, cohabitation, and infidelity. She collaborates with the development of relationship education curricula and is a practicing psychologist.