

## How Do I Talk With My Partner About Marriage Education?

**Assure your partner that marriage education will not be like group therapy or force you to “air your dirty laundry” in public. It is for couples like you who want to strengthen their relationship.**

Asking your partner to attend a relationship education workshop might suggest that you think something is wrong or that you're not happy in your relationship, even if that is not the case. Marriage and relationship education is a fantastic support for couples who are looking to improve an already good relationship or couples who may be struggling with an on-going issue. The tips below can help you start your discussion about marriage education with your partner.

Let your partner know that you would like to discuss an important issue. Make sure you reach out to him or her at an appropriate time (i.e. not in the middle of an argument or after he/she just received bad news), when there are no distractions and you are both relatively stress-free and well-rested.

Discuss the issue in ways that are focused mostly on you and how you currently feel, and how you expect to benefit from marriage education.

### **Use “I” Statements**

Discuss the issue in ways that are focused mostly on you and how you currently feel, and how you expect to benefit from marriage education. Starting your sentences with phrases like “It seems to me...,” “I feel (or think, or want)...,” or “This will help me because...” will help make the conversation less threatening to your partner.

### **Explain Marriage Education**

Make sure you relay to your partner what marriage education is and is not. For example, marriage education will teach you the skills to:

- ✓ Communicate effectively
- ✓ Resolve conflict productively (a key characteristic in couples who thrive in marriage)
- ✓ Discuss expectations



- ✓ Deal with anger and emotions constructively
- ✓ Forgive and make healthy sacrifices to benefit the relationship
- ✓ Work together as a team
- ✓ Have fun together
- ✓ Strengthen your trust in and commitment to the relationship

Assure your partner that marriage education will not be like group therapy or force you to “air your dirty laundry” in public. It is for couples like you who want to strengthen their relationship.

Discuss with your partner your list of reasons for seeking marriage education and how you think it might benefit your relationship. Share with your partner concerns about:

- ✓ Communication barriers
- ✓ Financial issues causing a strain on the relationship
- ✓ How to increase intimacy and romance
- ✓ An ongoing disagreement in your relationship

After you've explained your list of reasons for seeking marriage education, give your partner time to share his or her thoughts. Realize that even though you've done some research and know what you might want out of marriage education, your partner might not have considered the need, or might see things differently. You might need to give him or her a couple of days to think about it. Be open and willing to compromise based on his or her wants.

## **Be Open to Your Partner's Thoughts and Feelings**

After you've explained your list of reasons for seeking marriage education, give your partner time to share his or her thoughts. Realize that even though you've done some research and know what you might want out of marriage education, your partner might not have considered the need, or might see things differently. You might need to give him or her a couple of days to think about it. Be open and willing to compromise based on his or her wants.

Decide together what is best for you. It is helpful to know what options exist. You may need to call and talk with someone to learn more about the program. If a program has a flier or brochure, request one to share with your partner, or look at the Web site together. It is typically better to decide on a program jointly rather than to inform your partner of the program you will attend. Try to find programs that may appeal to your partner in terms

of location (close to home or work), time commitment (all-day workshop, weekend retreat or several weekly sessions), learning style and setting (offered in a community or faith-based setting). If you determine that a workshop is not ideal, then you can both read a book about marriage, or watch a video/DVD set or an online/computer-based program to suit your needs.

## **Don't Get Discouraged**

After you have worked hard to research and communicate to your partner, he or she might not choose to take part in marriage education. While it is always ideal for both partners to take an active role from the beginning, you can still find ways to obtain some form of marriage education for yourself. There are classes available for individuals, too. This follow-through on your part will show your partner that you are committed to the relationship and want to contribute to building a happy, healthy marriage.

***The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) would like to thank David Jones for his contribution to this Tip Sheet. David is a Certified Family Life Educator and author of a variety of relationship tools for fathers.***

***This is a product of the NHMRC, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR and Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH.***