



**national  
healthy marriage  
resource center**

## **January 2011 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions**

**Distinguishing Among Different  
Types of Intimate Partner Violence:  
Implications for Healthy  
Marriage Programs**

1. You made the comment that intimate partner violence is rarely found in survey findings. Can you explain?

**Michael Johnson:**

In survey research, the intimate terrorists and their victims refuse to participate so they don't show up in the survey at all. So the survey research really only gives you information about situational couple violence.

2. Could you talk more about how to access the alternative services for an individual or a couple that is screened out from participation in a healthy marriage program? Are there suggestions? Is it sometimes safer to not screen participants out if no good alternatives are available?

**Anne Menard:** I think programs should do a really honest appraisal of their capacity to address violence and abuse issues. And, again, there's a range in the capacity of programs. There are some healthy marriage and relationship programs that I'm aware of that have a strong clinical component and expert professionals who, in fact, have higher levels of capacity to deal with a more complex array of issues. Other programs are really not designed in that way nor have that capacity.

I would also encourage folks to look at the way that their programs are describing themselves in the community and make sure that you're engaging in "truth in advertising". If you're getting couples with very serious relationship problems that your program was never designed to address, you may be describing your program in ways that, again, create that disconnect. So you're then participating in the process of encouraging people to reach out to your program and then refusing them entry.

In terms of assessing for the availability of services, you need to have a good handle on what's available in your community for domestic violence victims and survivors for perpetrators of domestic violence. That can be from the domestic violence community, from your mental health community and other social services. You should also be aware of the national domestic hotline, which provides someone safe to talk to and explore what's going to be helpful to them.

If there really are no alternatives in your community that you can refer someone to, then I would encourage you to explore whether the individual who's disclosed as a victim can safely participate in your program, with or without their partner. The connections with other people, information about healthy versus unhealthy relationships—that might be helpful to them in their current and in future relationships. Some folks may only be able to participate with a safety plan that you help them develop or more ideally that your local domestic violence programs help them develop. But, I think the point here that we've learned from understanding the implications of screening out is that we don't want to leave individuals or victims hanging. We need to make sure they have resources.

3. **(Question for Diane Crosby)** Do people know that as they register or inquire about this program that they will be going through a background check? Also, how do you conduct the check? Is it through social security numbers, date of birth, names, city?

**Diane Crosby:** The court record review is really a process of having someone's name and date of birth. And in Ohio, ideally, all of those court records for convictions of a crime are available online from each of

those courts. And so you can just go onto the Web site, put in the name and date of birth and then it will search and bring up anything with that match. As people are registering [for Marriage Works], they are told that there is a court record review, that [court records are] public records and that in order to do that they need their name and date of birth.

4. How do you handle it when you see women as perpetrators?

**Diane Crosby:** I have found myself on the phone with perpetrators and victims regardless of gender. The process is really 'what are your needs?' Are you somebody that tends to use violence? Sometimes I will talk with them about why that (violence) may have occurred and I will get them appropriate information and resources; typically a Batterer's Reeducation or Intervention Program.

5. Is it difficult to determine when a partner is being placed in greater danger? What are some factors to consider when deciding 'next steps'?

**Michael Johnson:** First, I would screen for the major risk factors identified by tools such as Jacquelyn Campbell's danger assessment. Second, I would supplement that with some measure of coercive control (such as the one found in Johnson, Leone, and XU [2008]) Third, I would not rely only on such paper and pencil measures. Try to offer your participants a rich array of opportunities to safely disclose their concerns about safety.

**Anne Menard:** It is also important for anyone engaged in screening and assessment for safety concerns to know about local services and protections available and to be prepared to provide good referrals and linkages to these services and protections to anyone disclosing concerns.

**Diane Crosby:** My focus is not to determine if someone will be in greater danger, my goal is to determine if thinking patterns are present as related to power and control. If I find them, MRE is not an option because it will be dangerous. I will often times talk to the participant about concerns, and the thinking patterns that are commonly found; and then ask them if they think this [program] might be more harmful than helpful. Deciding next steps is different for everyone depending on their needs.

Victims: Generally, I try to at least help them find more answers and ways to educate themselves about what we've talked about. I often refer the book Why Does He Do That, Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men by Lundy Bancroft. (If I'm speaking to a male I will give a disclaimer about the title as the author also does in the forward.) I will try to connect them to the domestic violence resources in their community, and suggest individual counseling. Empowering is the most important piece. Next steps may include a safety plan, particularly if [they score] high on a 'lethality assessment'. In those cases where there may be immediate danger I will emphatically refer to the domestic violence program, and offer to meet them there (if possible).

Perpetrators: It is very important that when someone is asking for help, that there is no judgment. Perpetrators (for the most part) don't like what they have done, and I take the approach that education is how they can learn why they do this. I have been amazed with the level of honesty I have received

in using the Relationship Stressor Assessment. We will talk about learned behaviors, value systems and beliefs usually from childhood. I will give them referrals to get more information, and for a batterer's intervention program (BIP). (I do NOT refer to an anger management program; this is not about anger.) I try to give them hope that they can learn and can have success but also give them an idea to expect that it is hard work. I use an analogy about being right-handed and then deciding to be left-handed and have to re-learn how to do everything with the left hand. I have had some success, and have found that when the BIP has an individual who is willing to attend voluntarily, they meet them with great respect and hope. I will also refer to individual counseling.

6. (Question for Diane Crosby) I understood you to advise not to offer marriage education to anyone who has a history of [committing] domestic violence. Is that correct?

**Diane Crosby:** That is correct. Although I am hopeful that intervention [Marriage Works] will help them, it is not likely. If someone has had Batterer's Intervention I will engage them to try to decipher if the thinking patterns are still there. I have not found a single case where they're not still there. The goal is to find the thinking patterns (manipulation and control). Completing a court record review is the most effective way to find those. As I talk to these folks about the record, I can usually find the thinking patterns without a lot of effort or time involved. There are occasions that the charge doesn't match the thinking patterns and I will allow them to continue in MRE. As I complete the follow-up, I will try to find other resources for them and usually find that they are thankful and understand why we do this.

**Anne Menard: Completing a court record assessment, in cases where there is a criminal record, can be an effective way to identify these problematic and dangerous thinking patterns."The problem is that so few abusers will have a criminal record associated with their abuse. This is why you should also engage in other forms of screening and assessment -- such as the Relationship Stressor Assessment -- even if there is no criminal record evidence of abuse.**

7. (Question for Diane Crosby) Typically, how long does a class last and what amount of time is staff involved with a participant?

**Diane Crosby:** Marriage Works! Ohio offers several different 'classes' of short, medium, and long term duration. Just to be clear, the staff time involved with what I do is not in a class except the Healthy Couples Class which I facilitate.

I will spend a significant amount of time BEFORE a class starts completing court record review and follow-up. The amount of time varies depending on the number of records. I estimate that this takes approximately 20% of my job. The second step is completing the introduction video and administering the Relationship Stressor Assessment. The actual time I spend in the classroom with the video and verbal explanation is only about 20 minutes (twice). I estimate the total time is 30% of my job.

The third step is completing the follow-up on the phone with the Relationship Stressor Assessment. Again, this varies depending on how many people I need to talk to and how long each conversation takes (varying between 5 minutes and an hour). I would estimate that this process is about 40% of my job.

Finally, I facilitate a Healthy Couples Class which is eight weeks in duration with two hours each class and offered four times/year.

8. (Question for Diane Crosby) Is the first session only for screening and the informational session on DV? Are those who disclose not allowed to continue? Please discuss more the process of doing this without the offending partner knowing.

**Diane Crosby:** The first session is an introduction/intake process with many components. The facilitator has paperwork the participants need to complete, then I do my piece (about 30 mins total) and then the facilitator will give an overview of the class with an idea of what they can expect to learn and gain from the class.

I tell all participants that I complete a follow-up on the Relationship Stressor Assessment both randomly and specifically. I also reiterate that the class is not about domestic violence and that what I do is completely different, and handled outside of the classroom.

Ironically, I usually have both partners to call and they are usually honest and open for the opportunity. (When I do the follow-up with the court record review, I contact whoever called to register; it's not usually the person with the record.)

[In having them fill out the assessment] it's important to first address the term 'disclose'. I actually tell them I would be lying if I said there were things on the RSA that my husband and I haven't done on occasion... which is true. The RSA will pick up conflict, and emotion which is NOT a concern. The important part is figuring out what is a concern. If we come to the decision that they shouldn't continue, we then plan on how to tell the partner.

9. How do you account for the men who are too ashamed, macho, etc. to be honest about the various forms of partner violence or control they may be encountering?

**Michael Johnson:** Disclosure can be difficult for both men and women. Instruments that screen for coercive control and other risk factors can be empowering in some circumstances. They can, however, raise concerns over partner curiosity about your answers if both partners are filling them out—and that can inhibit honest responses. Thus, it is important, if possible, to provide participants opportunities for disclosure that are confidential and that feel safe both physically and emotionally.

**Anne Menard:** An individual – male or female—may not feel comfortable disclosing safety concerns until they know more about you and your program.

10. While not counseling, there are many mediators who will offer services to couples if there has not been a recent incident of violence, or will only look for physical violence when determining appropriateness for mediation. What are the best intake features for mediators (either for divorce process, custody/visitation planning or other relationship issue mediations)?

**Michael Johnson:** I would only say that it would be important to screen for coercive control even if there

is no violence. The critical issue in mediation is whether it is possible for the process to be equitable, which it could not be if one of the participants is in the habit of exercising coercive control over the other.

For selected essays and articles by Michael Johnson on domestic violence please visit his website at <http://www.personal.psu.edu/mpj/>.

For additional NHMRC Resources on Domestic Violence type the word “DV” or “Domestic Violence” in the search form at the top of each webpage at [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org).