

Marriage Education and Domestic Violence

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Identifying and appropriately responding to domestic violence issues within healthy marriage initiatives will be extremely important. Two fundamental questions include:

- How will each healthy marriage initiative ensure that there are safe, confidential opportunities to disclose domestic violence and that the decision to participate is voluntary and informed?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that domestic violence issues are safely and routinely identified and appropriately addressed by well-trained personnel?

It is essential that all project partners appreciate the complexities often associated with disclosing domestic violence and work collaboratively to ensure adequate supports and safeguards are in place. This will be particularly important when working with intact couples identifying current or past domestic violence.

The following design and implementation questions require particular attention and should be addressed in a domestic violence protocol for project partners:

- How and by whom will potential participants in the healthy marriage activities be identified?
- How will domestic violence issues be explored with potential participants, by whom, and at what points of contact?
- What happens when disclosures of domestic violence occur? When might it be appropriate, if ever, for a domestic violence victim to participate in a healthy marriage program, with or without the abusive partner? When might healthy co-parenting be a more appropriate goal than healthy marriage?
- What types of training will staff need to respond to disclosures of domestic violence, whenever they occur?
- How will domestic violence disclosure information be shared among the project partners? How will the confidentiality and privacy of domestic violence victims be maintained?
- How do the healthy marriage curricula and other program materials to be used in the project address domestic violence issues?
- What roles can local and state domestic violence experts play in the design and implementation of marriage education activities to ensure that adequate supports and safeguards are in place?