



Definitions of Healthy Marriage *

In the last few years, researchers and marriage educators have been searching to find a consensus definition of a “healthy marriage”. Clearly, happy, long-lasting marriages come in all shapes and sizes. But can we identify some of the core characteristics that they have in common?

A comprehensive review of the research conducted by Child Trends (Moore et al. 2004) found that healthy marriages are when couples :

- Are committed to each other for the long haul
- Are satisfied overall with their marriage
- Have positive, good communication
- Can resolve disagreements and conflicts
- Never resort to violence or abuse
- Are sexually (and psychologically) faithful
- Spend positive, enjoyable time together
- Provide intimacy and emotional support
- Are mutually committed to any children they have

Scott Stanley and Howard Markman (Stanley, 2004) believe it is useful to think about healthy marriages as those which have three fundamental types of safety:

- **Safety in interaction.** Being able to talk openly and well (enough) about key issues without repeated negative interactions (escalation of conflict, criticism, put-downs, withdrawal, contempt and so forth).
- **Personal safety.** Mutual respect and understanding, and freedom from fear of physical or emotional harm and intimidation.
- **Commitment safety.** Being secure of mutual support both now and in the future.

* see Box 5, page 10 from Building Bridges Between Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood, and Domestic Violence Programs by Theodora Ooms, Anne Menard et al. 2006 www.clasp.org

Moore, Kristin et al, (2004), *What is a Healthy Marriage? Defining the Concept*. Research Brief. www.childtrends.org

Scott, Stanley, (2004) *What is a Healthy marriage?* Excerpt from testimony given before the Senate Finance Committee, May 5, 2004.

