



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC July 2009 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

**Delivering Relationship Education to Singles:
Programming and Marketing Issues**

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1. How early should programs or parents begin introducing children to healthy relationships skills?

Healthy relationship skills are relevant skills that parents teach children from the very beginning. Choosing a friend that has good qualities, like trustworthiness, and knowing what makes a good friendship, are important concepts that kids should learn from an early age. This translates to having good healthy romantic relationships in the long run, since so many qualities required in a good friendship also apply to what makes a good romantic relationship.

Children learn from observing other people. Healthy marriage and relationship education programs give the parents the skills to talk to their children about healthy relationships. The How to Avoid a Jerk(ette) program offers a parenting guide and a seminar for parents to talk to their children about relationships.

2. Why is it important to offer relationship education to singles?

When single people enter relationships, they already have experiences that inform their expectations of their partners and the relationship. These experiences and expectations could lead to unhealthy decisions. Teaching single people relationship skills is an important way to equip each individual with what he or she needs before entering a relationship and then maintaining healthy relationships. Instead of stepping into a relationship when it is already experiencing problems, offering relationship education to singles allows them to have

the skills and knowledge to make healthy decisions in the future. Relationship education also offers each individual an opportunity to think about their expectations, the kind of partner they would like to be, and the kind of partner they need and want.

3. Do strategies and marketing tools used to reach teens also apply to college- age students?

The Auburn University and Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative (AHMI) established teen advisory groups and requested feedback as they went through high school and entered college. From the feedback they received from these groups, Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace are relevant social networking sources across age groups, and allow youth to keep in touch with friends. These are also important vehicles for connecting with both the college and non-college groups. These networking sites engage individuals and keep them connected to high school, community, or college friends who might have moved away. While access to internet might be an issue in many groups still, both teens and young adults are finding time and means of visiting these sites.

4. While reaching teens and college-age students, do you also engage their friends and family?

The Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative (AHMI) at Auburn University hosts a Relationship Smarts Weekend that invites family and friends for a weekend of activities and relationship education lessons. This gives the guests an idea of relationship education, which piques their interest in participating in the program.

It is important to reach an individual's family and community, because engaging family and friends provides the individual with a support system. Impacting young people's environment allows for community members to support them as they navigate future relationships. The course does not become a stand-alone experience for individuals to rely on to understand relationship skills. They can now rely on family and friends to help them with their skills.

AHMI also uses community events, like football games, to reach out to the community. During tailgates, they provide family oriented activities. They put together entertainment for people to see as they walk by, such as street performances. Creating an environment that engages families and people to think about relationships promotes community change.

5. What messages register best with the youth population? Are there specific emotions that are more meaningful to them?

People remember things that are exciting and important in their life. Whether youth have parents actively involved in their life or not, they have a strong sense of family and a desire to know more about their parents. Youth and young adults actually have positive ideas about marriage and relationships, and they value moments that bring together the family or friends. Using images and messages that convey the belief that it is possible to achieve their hopes reinforces their expectations for engaging in positive relationships.

There is a lot of negative messaging about relationships and families, and youth recognize this negativity. They are constantly bombarded with

negative statistics, but youth are looking for positive messages. They want to see that they have the opportunity to do whatever it is that they want to accomplish. Therefore, the message has to convey the notion that they can have a positive relationship.

6. What impact do media have on how people think about relationships?

Media is integral to how singles deal with relationships. Media allows individuals to experience relationships in antithetical ways; while individuals constantly see ideas of relationships that influence them and are connected to people, their actual interactions are through Internet social networking sites and these encounters are less personal. Media both increases interaction between people and reduces one-on-one contact. The recent trend in television is reality shows, which contain a lot of fantasy. This melding of what is real and what is fantastical has influenced and skewed people's view of relationships. These shows create ambiguity in people's lives in regard to what they can expect and what is unrealistic in relationships. Individuals increasingly rely not just on the media sources to connect with people but get ideas on what is normative and acceptable.

7. What are the inter-generational trends and differences as to how individuals enter and think about relationships?

There have been major shifts in how people view relationships. Individualism is an important value that is on the rise. Societal value on preserving individualism in dating relationships is an important change. While this varies with ethnicities and cultures, cultures across the world are embracing individualism, or at least aspects of it.

Half a century ago, marrying within your own ethnicity might have been the norm in the United States, and families used to be much more involved through the adolescence process into adulthood and into marriage. Today, an individual's ethnicity and background are much more segmented. An individual's family is no longer the only source of social and familial values.

With the increasing presence of social networks informing social norms, there is much more exchange of ideas. Individuals have access to universal truths, expressed in practical language, that empower them to feel like they know better and that they know what they are doing. Individuals believe they know what relationships looks like, including premarital and marital, and how to make these relationships successful. This is one of the major shifts and struggles faced by the current generation.

8. Can you explain the principles taught in Dr. John Van Epp's "How to Avoid a Jerk(ette)" Program?

The Jerk(ette) program has different versions that address needs of different cohorts: college-age, young adult singles, and singles in their 40s, 50s, and 60s. The programs help individuals learn and make decisions wherever they might be in their relationship, including: what they are looking for in a partner, who they are as a partner in a relationship, how they build and grow relationships, and what kind of relationships they are currently in.

Four of the major points in the curriculum are: (1) Character development – how to be a healthy partner; (2) Partner selection – how to choose a healthy partner; (3) Relationship development – how to develop healthy relationships; and (4) Individualism – balancing partnership in a growingly individualistic

society. The program discusses connecting heart knowledge with head knowledge by slowing down the pace of a relationship. The program encourages couples to use this time to learn about the partner and each other's expectations.

9. How do we view the videos that Charles Jackson (AHMI) discussed during the presentation?

Websites such as www.realteenrelationships.com offer examples of age appropriate media to reach the teen population. You can access the media by clicking on "Real Teen Media" on the top right corner of the website, scroll down to the bottom of the page, and click on "Special Videos." You can find a number of videos and radio advertisements that the presenter selected as good examples of media geared to target a teen audience. You can view them by clicking on the names of each video.