

Characteristics of Successful Marriage Educators

Good marriage educators or workshop facilitators are essential to program success.

Although a strong curriculum is important, talented facilitators can make or break a healthy marriage program. Effective marriage educators are people with great facilitation skills and a passion about what they are doing.

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right fit for your program. Remember that there are some things you can teach (such as a curriculum, how to use a LCD projector, how to administer a pre/post test) and some things that are innate, such as a sense of humor, charisma, self-awareness and the ability to connect with a group. Below is a list of characteristics you may want to consider in hiring workshop facilitators:

Able to manage group dynamics

Group dynamics are a key to productive experiences for the couple in healthy marriage programs. You want a facilitator who can keep one person/couple from monopolizing the workshop or handle an individual with negative energy.

Support your mission

Good facilitators don't need to be marriage experts, but a strong marriage educator must believe in the mission of your program. They should "walk the talk" and apply the skills they are teaching in their own lives.

Committed and dependable

You want people who will be on time and prepared. People who are responsible, prepare for workshops, and come equipped with materials for the delivery of interactive workshops, for the entire length of your program.

Creative

Many curricula benefit from the creativity of facilitators who can enhance the materials through activities which illustrate the core curriculum messages.

Energetic and engaging

Working with couples/individuals over a multi-session series of workshops is hard work! Good facilitators



should be able to keep their energy level up and continue to engage the audience. (Having co-facilitators can help with this.)

Focus on education and empowerment

Marriage educators are teaching skills, not fixing people's problems. A good facilitator provides tools with practical examples that allow participants to create solutions for their own problems.

Hopeful

Believing in the couples/individuals they are working with and their ability to accomplish healthy relationships is essential.

A good facilitator will connect and empathize with the audience.

Know the audience

A good facilitator will connect and empathize with the audience. The ability to explain concepts and terminology through relevant examples will support learning.

Knowledgeable about community resources

Workshop participants may approach your facilitators about challenges they are currently facing. Although it is not essential, it is beneficial if your facilitators are aware of what supports exist in the community.

Non-judgmental

People in the marriage education workshop may share experiences or stories that your facilitator may not "approve" of and he/she needs to be prepared to respond in a non-judgmental manner and keep the group on track.

Successful workshop leaders will understand that adults learn in different ways and they will incorporate different teaching styles into the delivery of your program.

Respect boundaries

Facilitators must be comfortable setting ground rules in a workshop and keeping the couples/individuals focused on skill building, not problem sharing/solving.

Self aware

Even talented facilitators may not do justice to your program if they are freshly wounded by failed relationships or not in the "right place" emotionally to effectively lead healthy marriage workshops. A successful marriage educator must be aware of his/her own issues.

Understand adult learning models

Successful workshop leaders will understand that adults learn in different ways and they will incorporate different teaching styles into the delivery of your program.

Exemplify humility

Successful workshop leaders admit that their own acquisition of the skills is a work in progress and that they continue to grow daily.

The NHMRC would like to thank Katherine Robredo, an independent consultant and expert in workshop facilitation, for contributing to this tip sheet.