

Why Marriage Education and Enrichment?

Marriage relationships tend to move through fairly predictable stages. At first, in the rush and excitement of a new romance and of the wedding itself, differences seem charming and attractive. As a couple settles into life together, brain chemicals stimulated by the newness of their relationship wear off. Their differences may begin to cause tension and disagreement, which can lead to disappointment and disillusionment. With commitment, willingness to grow, and access to supportive information and experiences, husband and wife may renegotiate their relationship to accommodate and compensate for their differences and for their changing needs and perspectives. By focusing on their common goals and cultivating the positives in their relationship, they may arrive at a stage of deeper love and friendship.

Some couples, however, come into marriage with unreasonable expectations that they will simply live “happily ever after” - if they have married the right person. Brides and grooms, often unaware of the personal agendas and baggage they bring to marriage, may be surprised as they begin to unpack them. Harville Hendrix, in *Getting the Love You Want* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988, pp. 33-40), claims that we are drawn – often subconsciously -- to persons who can help us grow. We might be attracted to someone who exhibits the positive traits of our parents or primary caregivers, believing that life with that partner will unfold smoothly. We might marry persons with the negative traits of our parents; the child of an alcoholic, for example, may marry an alcoholic, consciously or subconsciously expecting to cure the other’s addiction. Or we might choose mates with qualities we have suppressed in our selves, as in the case of the fun-loving individual who marries someone more serious and responsible. We may also replicate the relationship patterns and communication styles of our parents, even if we intended never to do so, acting out roles we learned in our family of origin.

Early quarrels begin to surface the issues a couple needs to deal with, but it may take time and skill to discover the deeper causes of their arguments. David and Vera Mace, early pioneers in the marriage education and enrichment movement, urged couples to “never waste a good conflict,” but to greet each one as an opportunity to grow. (*How to Have a Happy Marriage*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1977, pp. 99) Effective marriage education and enrichment experiences help individuals grow spiritually as they deepen their self-understanding, learn to share feelings without attacking, and listen to each other with empathy and understanding, even when disagreeing. Without marriage education and enrichment, couples may miss opportunities to grow either by denying that conflicts exist or by assuming they must have married the wrong person. Marriage education and enrichment can prevent and heal relationship breakdown by helping couples know what to expect and develop skills to manage both internal conflicts and external crises. Marriage education and enrichment must also encourage couples to affirm and build on their strengths in order to cultivate a deeply rewarding and lasting bond in which they experience God’s grace and the power of mature love.

Resources on reverse side

At www.marriagelovepower.net, click “Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources” and scroll down through all the categories for articles related to various marriage and family issues. Or at www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries, search by topic or title. Here are a few examples of resources described in these documents:

Better Marriages (a non-sectarian organization formerly known as ACME, the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment): 800-634-8325, info@bettermarriages.org, www.bettermarriages.org. Better Marriages promotes enrichment opportunities and resources to "strengthen couple relationships and enhance personal growth, mutual fulfillment and family wellness." Better Marriages focuses mainly on helping couples in good marriages achieve their full potential. A leadership training and certification program provides skills for leading various couple events. Members receive a bimonthly newsletter with schedules of upcoming events, book reviews, and articles addressing marriage issues. An International Better Marriages Conference held every few years offers plenary presentations and workshops for couples and leaders, Call the office or visit the website to find leader couples and events in your area and to sign up for email newsletters.

Marriage Encounter/Engaged Encounter United Methodist, www.encounter.org. One of the twelve faith expressions of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, ME/EEUM offers Christian weekend experiences for couples who want to prepare for or enrich their marriages. A team of lay couples and a clergy-spouse couple make a series of presentations. Each presentation encourages participants to look at themselves as individuals; at their relationship with each other; and at their relationship with God, the church, and the world. Following each presentation, husband and wife are given time in the privacy of their own room for personal sharing using the techniques taught during the weekend. No group discussion is required. Post-weekend experiences for nurturing ongoing growth are offered in many local areas. Visit the website above to learn about events scheduled for your area. Visit www.wwme.org or call 800-795-5683 to learn more about Worldwide Marriage Encounter and other faith expressions of this ministry.

Growing Love in Christian Marriage Couple's Manual (3rd Edition), by Joan and Richard Hunt (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013). This couple's workbook provides information, suggestions, and discussion exercises, along with Scripture and other worship resources, for engaged or newlywed couples to use on their own or with guidance from a pastor or mentor couple. Marriage issues are addressed in the four themes of Faith, Hope, Love, and Power. The workbook includes a pre-marital inventory, for which administration and interpretation instructions are provided in the *Growing Love in Christian Marriage Pastor's Manual*, below. Couples may utilize this most effectively if each person has a copy to read and in which to write.

Growing Love in Christian Marriage Pastor's Manual (3rd Edition), by Jane P. and S. Clifton Ives (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013). This manual offers guidance and resources for pre-marital counseling and other aspects of marriage and family ministry, including relationship education for children, youth, and young adults; marriage education and enrichment; selection and training of mentor couples, and interventions for those in transition or crisis. An extensive list of “Additional Resources” includes a variety of organizations and programs that may be readily available and that can be incorporated into local church and community ministries. Visit the websites www.marriagelovepower.net and <http://www.gbod.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries> for updates and expansion of this “Additional Resources” list, a “United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministry Directory” of leaders and consultants, a training model for *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, and “Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources” documents addressing a variety of topics.

Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, LLC, 5310 Belt Road, NW, Washington, DC 20015-1961, 202-362-3332, Fax: 202-362-0973, CMFCE@smartmarriages.com, www.smartmarriages.com. This non-partisan, non-sectarian organization offers the most comprehensive source of marriage and family ministry information and resources. For 14 years, ending in 2010, the Coalition held an annual Smart Marriages/Happy Families conference, bringing together researchers, program developers, and other experts for plenary sessions, seminars, workshops, and training institutes. At the website, you can order recordings of the presentations made at those conferences, read articles on a variety of relevant topics, check the Directory of Programs for available relationship education courses, and sign up for a free e-newsletter.